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Report to Congress on Requesters

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## General Government Division

B-259793

February 28, 1995

The Honorable Orrin G. Hatch,  
Chairman  
The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.,  
Ranking Minority Member  
Committee on the Judiciary  
United States Senate

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ACQUISITIONS

The Honorable William F. Goodling,  
Chairman  
The Honorable William L. Clay,  
Ranking Minority Member  
Committee on Economic and  
Educational Opportunity  
House of Representatives

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Amendments of 1992 (P.L. 102-586) requires us to study gender-bias issues in state juvenile justice systems' handling of status offenders. Youth who have come in contact with the juvenile justice system by committing an offense (such as liquor offenses, running away, truancy, or ungovernable behavior) that would not be a crime if committed by an adult are status offenders.<sup>1</sup> For purposes of this review, we have defined "gender bias" as intentional or unintentional differences in the juvenile justice systems' outcomes of female and male status offenders who (except for gender) have similar characteristics, such as age, status offense, and prior offense history. As agreed with your Committees, our specific objectives were to (1) compare the outcome of the intake<sup>2</sup> decisions and the frequency and outcomes of detentions, adjudications, and out-of-home placements of female and male status offenders<sup>3</sup> and (2) compare the availability of facilities and services for female and male status offenders in selected jurisdictions.

<sup>1</sup>Delinquents are juveniles who are found to have committed an offense that would be criminal if committed by an adult.

<sup>2</sup>Intake is the process during which a juvenile referral or complaint is received by the court or prosecutor's office.

<sup>3</sup>Detention is the placement of youth who may have committed a status offense in a facility, which may be secure, while awaiting processing by juvenile justice authorities. The cases of those youths who are formally processed may involve adjudication and disposition hearings. At an adjudication hearing, the juvenile court determines if the youth has committed a status offense. If so, at a concurrent or a subsequent disposition hearing, the judge determines an appropriate action or treatment plan for the status offender. The juvenile court judge's disposition options include dismissal of the case, probation, fine or restitution, community service, and placement in an out-of-home facility.

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## Results in Brief

On the basis of our models using National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ)<sup>4</sup> data, the county probation officers' responses to our survey, and our visits to selected facilities, we found minimal gender bias, as we defined it.

According to NCJJ's national data, 500,620 status-offender cases were petitioned to juvenile courts in the United States during the 6-year period from 1986 to 1991. (These data did not include youth who were handled informally—picked up, counseled, and/or released.) Of these cases, about 40 percent involved females and 60 percent involved males. Our analyses showed that females and males had similar probabilities (percent chances) of being detained, adjudicated, or placed for about 60 percent of the offense categories. For the remaining 40 percent, females and males had different probabilities for the 3 outcomes. On the basis of the relative numbers of cases involving females versus males, female runaway cases outnumbered male runaway cases by about 1-1/2 times, while male liquor offender cases outnumbered female liquor offender cases by about 3 times. However, our national-level analyses alone cannot be used to draw conclusions about either the presence or the absence of gender bias. Such conclusions cannot be drawn because NCJJ's national data files did not contain sufficient information on prior histories of status offenders and other variables relevant to judges' decisions in the cases. Therefore, to enable us to determine if gender bias existed, we developed 25 statistical models using data from those states with appropriate data for these more in-depth analyses.

In comparing outcomes for female and male status offenders in relationship to gender bias, each of the 25 models considered and accounted for case characteristics—such as each youth's prior offense history and age—that, according to the models, generally influence intake and judicial decisions. For five of the six intake regression models, our results indicated no evidence of gender bias. Similarly, for 14 of the 19 regression models for the detention, adjudication, and placement decisions, our results indicated no evidence of gender bias in the juvenile courts' handling of status offenders. However, for the one intake model that exhibited a difference for a specific state, females were more likely to be petitioned to juvenile court than males. For the other five state-specific models—three detention, one adjudication, and one placement—females were less likely to be detained, adjudicated, or placed than males. Our analysis also showed that certain factors, such as offenders' prior offense

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<sup>4</sup>NCJJ, which is located in Pittsburgh, PA, is the research division of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

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history and source of referral, affected the status offenders' outcomes. While our models indicated no evidence of gender bias in 19 cases and some evidence in 6 cases, our results were limited to those aspects of the juvenile justice system for which data existed.

At the 15 facilities we visited, we generally found minimal gender-based differences in the availability of counseling, educational, and medical services for females and males, although the extent of such services varied by type of facility. The 10 co-educational facilities offered similar services for females and males, although some of the facilities provided females with health services, such as gynecological services and prenatal care, not applicable to males. Officials at the other five facilities (four serving females and one serving males) said that their programs were not gender-based and could be replicated or offered to either females or males. The only gender-based difference we noted involved admission physicals. At two of the female-only group homes, health examinations included testing (which could be refused at one of the homes) for sexually transmitted diseases, whereas, at similar male-only facilities operated by the same organizations, such testing was not done unless requested by the males.

The survey responses from the county probation officers did not indicate any significant gender-bias concerns. The respondents reported that generally no differences existed in the way females and males with similar status-offense histories were treated within their juvenile justice systems.

About 70 percent of juvenile probation officers who responded for their departments reported that treatment options, e.g., facilities and services, were about equally available for detained female and male status offenders. While some respondents noted that overall more facilities were needed for both females and males, they added that there were more facilities for males than females.<sup>5</sup>

Officials in the jurisdictions and at the facilities we visited emphasized that, in their view, insufficient facilities and services were available for status offenders, irrespective of gender. These officials said that more resources were needed for female and male status offenders. These needed resources included early-intervention programs to divert first-time offenders from further involvement in the juvenile justice system. Officials said that status offenders did not need gender-specific services, except for

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<sup>5</sup>The respondents did not give us data on the number of males or females who could have been placed in the facilities. Therefore, we could not determine if disproportionately more facilities exist for males than females.

gynecological services and prenatal care. The officials had mixed views about whether the needs of status offenders were better met by co-educational or single-gender facilities.

## Background

Juvenile justice is primarily the domain of state and local authorities. Thus, juvenile courts' jurisdiction and procedures can vary widely throughout the United States. For instance, depending upon the state and the alleged offense, the juvenile courts' jurisdiction may end at age 18, 17, 16, or even younger. Referrals of youth to juvenile justice authorities can come from various sources, including police officers, parents, schools, and social service agencies. Police officers account for 41 percent of the referrals, according to 1989 Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) data.

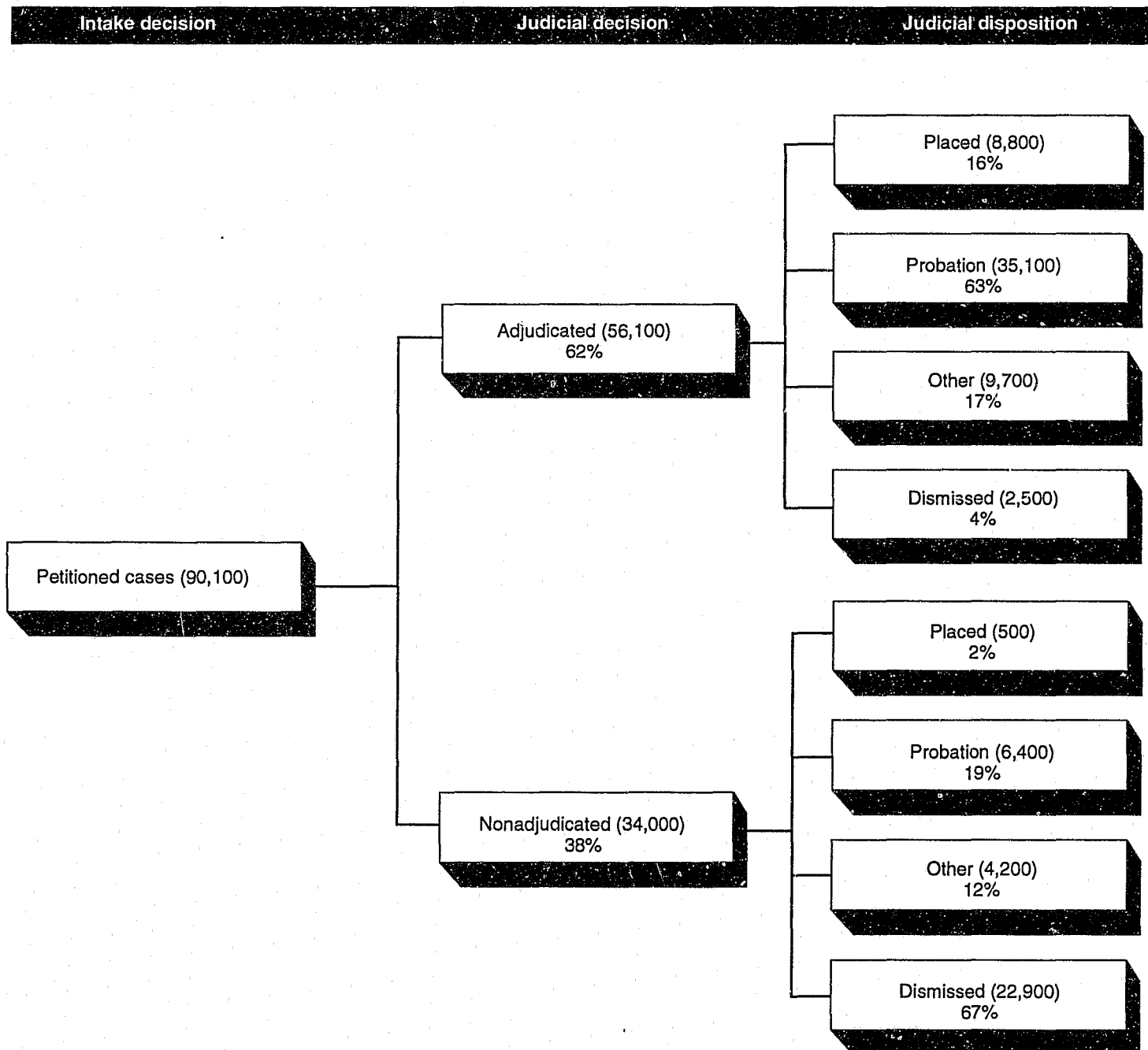
Generally, after an alleged status offender is referred to juvenile authorities, screening or intake staff (e.g., a juvenile probation officer) decide whether the case should be handled formally or informally. Juveniles can be temporarily placed in detention centers at some point between referral and case disposition by the court. If the intake decision were to proceed formally, a petition is drafted and filed to provide notice of the offenses that will be pursued. The petition charges the youth with a status-offense violation and identifies the youth and those other persons who should be informed of the proceedings. These proceedings include an adjudication hearing and possibly a disposition hearing. At the adjudication hearing, the juvenile court judge reviews evidence and determines if the youth has committed a status offense. At a concurrent or subsequent disposition hearing, the judge determines an appropriate action or treatment plan for the status offender. The juvenile court judge's disposition options include dismissal of the case, probation, fine or restitution, community service, and placement. Placement refers to any "out-of-home" disposition, which usually takes place in residential facilities. These facilities provide 24-hour care to juveniles. The following are types of residential facilities:

- Detention centers: secure, residential facilities.
- Group homes: nonsecure facilities that are intended to provide a residential environment in which to meet the long-term counseling needs of troubled youth.
- Shelters: nonsecure facilities that are intended to provide overnight or short-term housing and crisis intervention counseling to troubled youth.

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Figure 1 shows the number of petitioned juvenile cases processed by the juvenile courts in 1991, according to OJDP data.

Figure 1: Juvenile Court Processing of Petitioned Status-Offense Cases, 1991



(Figure notes on next page)

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Note: Percentages may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.

Source: OJJDP data.

Cases handled informally usually do not involve a petition or an adjudication hearing. These informal (nonpetitioned) cases may be dismissed; possible reasons for dismissal include lack of evidence or the youth's receiving a warning or counseling. Even when cases can be handled informally, juveniles can be given probation or even placed. As shown in figure 1, 2 percent (or 500) of all petitioned nonadjudicated cases in 1991 resulted in juveniles' being placed.

According to OJJDP, in many jurisdictions, most status-offense cases are handled informally. In many communities, county attorneys, family crisis units, or social service agencies—rather than the juvenile courts—have assumed responsibility for screening and diverting alleged status offenders from the juvenile justice system.

Even though juvenile justice is primarily the responsibility of state and local authorities, Congress has taken an increased interest in juvenile justice issues during the past two decades. Most significantly, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, as amended (42 U.S.C. 5601 *et seq.*), established a formula grant program for states to improve their juvenile justice systems. States receive formula grant funds if they comply with certain requirements. One of these requirements was that status offenders should not be held in secure detention facilities, such as jails, police lockups, juvenile detention centers, or training schools. In 1980, Congress amended the law to allow states to detain status offenders under certain conditions and still receive their grant funds. According to OJJDP regulations, these status offenders must be provided certain procedural protections.<sup>6</sup>

Some child advocacy groups have raised concerns about the lack of appropriate placement services for females in the juvenile justice system. For example, in September 1992, the National Network for Runaway and Homeless Youth Services advocated the need to review gender bias within the states' juvenile justice systems. In addition, some studies have

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<sup>6</sup>In 1991, we reported on the states' use of this amendment. See our report entitled Noncriminal Juveniles: Detentions Have Been Reduced but Better Monitoring Is Needed (GAO/GGD-91-65, Apr. 24, 1991).



indicated that females were more likely to be detained for status offenses than males.

## Scope and Methodology

To aid us in defining gender bias and in designing models or approaches to address the objectives, we reviewed relevant literature identified in bibliographies provided us by NCJJ and OJDP. Regarding the first objective, we used NCJJ's national estimates of status-offender data for calendar years 1986 through 1991 to develop gender-specific probabilities of detentions, adjudications, and placements for status offenders by offense categories. However, these data did not contain sufficient information relevant to judges' decisions to assess gender bias, e.g., prior offense history and source of referral for the offense.<sup>7</sup> To examine gender bias, we did further analysis using data from several states that had additional variables beyond those used for NCJJ's national estimates. We developed 6 models to study the outcome of intake decisions in 6 states and 19 models to further study detentions, adjudications, and placements in 7 states. We used a class of models commonly used in criminological research to analyze these types of outcomes. We used NCJJ's state-specific data files to conduct regression analyses<sup>8</sup> for seven states—Arizona, California, Florida, Missouri, Nebraska, South Carolina, and Utah. Data limitations precluded us from developing models for status offender intake decisions in Nebraska, placements in Arizona, and detentions in Utah. Further, we could not address possible gender bias elsewhere in the juvenile justice system because data did not exist. For example, the data did not include youths who were handled informally—picked up, counseled, and/or released by the police or by county juvenile department intake officials.

To compare the availability of facilities and services, we visited a total of 15 facilities located in 9 counties—generally 2 counties (a rural county and an urban county) within each of 4 selected states (Florida, Kentucky, Maryland, and Texas).<sup>9</sup>

We mailed a survey to a national sample of county probation department officials to obtain (1) opinions on differences in the juvenile justice

<sup>7</sup>At the time of our review, NCJJ did not have national statistics available for calendar year 1992. The national NCJJ data did not represent the universe of status offenders. Rather, the data included only those status offenders who were petitioned to or otherwise handled more formally by the juvenile courts.

<sup>8</sup>Regression analysis was used to identify causal relationships between or among two or more key variables, such as gender and age of the juvenile, current offense category, and prior offense categories and dispositions.

<sup>9</sup>We visited three counties in Kentucky (see table 5).

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systems' processing of status offenders and (2) perspectives on the availability of facilities and services for status offenders. By using a national sample, we were able to project the results to our study population of 1,249 chief juvenile justice probation officers.

Appendix I presents more details about our objectives, scope, and methodology, including a discussion of how we selected states for analysis with respect to our second objective. Appendix V contains a copy of the survey and the survey's results.

We did our work from March 1993 through August 1994 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Since no federal agency has responsibility for the issues discussed in this report, we did not obtain official comments on a draft of this report. However, we did discuss our results with NCJJ and OJJDP officials and, where appropriate, incorporated their comments.

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## Minimal Gender Bias in Juvenile Justice Systems' Handling of Status Offenders

Our analyses of 6 years of national data indicated that there were only relatively small differences in the percentages of female and male status offenders detained, adjudicated, and placed. With six exceptions, our logistic regression analyses<sup>10</sup> of intake decisions, detentions, adjudications, and placements in seven states generally did not indicate any significant gender-based differences in the processing of female and male status offenders. In addition, our national survey of county probation officers and site visits did not identify any specific gender differences in juvenile justice systems.

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## National Data Revealed Small Percentage Differences

According to NCJJ national data, a total of 500,620 status-offender cases were petitioned to juvenile courts during calendar years 1986 through 1991.<sup>11</sup> Of the total petitioned status-offender cases, 41.3 percent (206,756 cases) involved females and 58.7 percent (293,864 cases) involved males. In terms of gender distinctions, two specific offense categories had noticeable differences in the numbers: females were involved in 61.9 percent of the running away offenses and males were involved in 74.3 percent of the liquor offenses.

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<sup>10</sup>Logistic regression analysis is a widely accepted statistical methodology used when the dependent variable is qualitative, such as if a status offender is detained. Regression analysis identifies relationships between the dependent variable and two or more key variables, such as gender and age of the juvenile, offender's current offense category, and prior offense categories and dispositions.

<sup>11</sup>NCJJ's national data did not include cases not petitioned to the juvenile court.

Table 1 shows that petitioned female status offenders had about the same probability, or percent chance, as petitioned male status offenders of being detained, adjudicated, or placed out-of-home during 1986 through 1991, for 60 percent of the outcomes. For example, the probabilities for female and male truants who were detained, adjudicated, or placed were within 2 percentage points of each other. The exceptions were in the offense categories of running away and liquor violations. For the offense categories of liquor violation, running away, truancy, and ungovernability, our data analysis showed that the probabilities of either female or male status offenders' being detained before disposition by the juvenile courts had declined from calendar years 1986 to 1991. For example, the probability of ungovernable female status offenders' being detained decreased from about 19 percent to 8 percent, and the decrease for males was from 19 percent to 9 percent (see app. II, table II.3).

**Table 1: Comparative Probabilities (by Status-Offense Category and Gender) Regarding Detentions, Adjudications, and Placements for Calendar Years 1986-1991**

Status offense (category and gender)	Percent chance for calendar years 1986-1991		
	Detained <sup>a</sup>	Adjudicated <sup>b</sup>	Adjudicated status offenders receiving placements <sup>c</sup>
Liquor offense			
Female	4.96	57.34	5.68
Male	6.37	59.69	8.42
Running away			
Female	22.54	49.04	31.25
Male	28.28	52.49	34.68
Truancy			
Female	3.31	67.51	9.17
Male	3.90	69.51	10.35
Ungovernable			
Female	13.61	65.97	32.11
Male	14.10	68.43	32.68
Other offenses <sup>d</sup>			
Female	16.99	63.89	31.28
Male	17.06	64.68	32.15

<sup>a</sup>These probabilities reflect the percent chance that petitioned cases involved detention of the alleged offender in a secure holding facility before disposition.

<sup>b</sup>These probabilities reflect the percent chance that status-offender cases petitioned to juvenile courts resulted in formal adjudication of the juveniles as status offenders.

<sup>c</sup>These probabilities reflect the percent chance that cases formally adjudicated as status-offense cases resulted in the juveniles' receiving out-of-home placements.

<sup>d</sup>The other offenses category includes various status offenses as defined by individual states, such as tobacco and curfew violations.

Source: Developed by GAO from NCJJ's National Juvenile Court Data Archive.

Regarding running away, our analyses showed that males had higher probabilities than females of being detained, adjudicated, or placed. Further, males with liquor offenses had higher probabilities of being adjudicated or placed than females. Appendix II provides more detailed analyses of NCJJ national data.

The national estimates did not enable us to determine whether gender bias occurred in the outcomes because these data did not contain variables that are likely to be relevant to judges' decisions (e.g., prior offense

histories). Accordingly, we developed statistical models to measure gender bias using data sets that contained appropriate variables.

### Analyses of Individual States' Data Did Not Indicate Bias

To analyze gender bias, we developed logistic regression models of the intake decisions for six of the seven states and the detention, adjudication, and placement decisions for seven states. Overall, the 25 models involved applications of the logistic regression procedure. That is, each state's models contained variables that measured characteristics that may be associated with the juvenile judicial system outcomes<sup>12</sup> and estimated how the characteristics influenced outcomes. These characteristics included the source of referral to the juvenile court, location (e.g., metropolitan or rural area) of the court, age and race of the offender, type of offense, and offender's prior offense history. We used these models to test for gender bias. For the intake decisions, we analyzed all cases referring to the intake staff; for the detention and adjudication decisions, we analyzed only petitioned cases; for the placement decisions, we analyzed cases of adjudicated status offenders.

Table 2 shows the "gender-bias quotients," which were the resulting estimates of gender bias from the models that we developed. As the gender-bias quotient approaches 1.0, the amount of estimated gender bias decreases. No specific criteria exist as to the extent that the quotient would have to deviate from 1.0 to indicate gender bias. In our judgment, however, a deviation from 1.0 of more than .2 would indicate the presence of gender bias.<sup>13</sup> Our results indicated that (1) in 5 of the 6 intake models, females were about equally as likely as males to be petitioned to juvenile court and (2) in 14 of the other 19 models, no gender bias was demonstrated in the juvenile justice systems' outcomes for status offenders. In the Florida intake model, females were more likely to be petitioned to juvenile court than males because the juvenile justice system treated females' characteristics, e.g., type of offense, differently due to their gender. In the other five models, we found some indication of gender bias in Arizona's, Florida's, and Nebraska's detention decisions and Florida's adjudication and placement decisions. These models indicated

<sup>12</sup>Data files from the states of Nebraska, Arizona, and Utah did not contain sufficient information to develop certain models. Specifically, we were unable to develop an intake model for Nebraska because two of its largest counties did not report nonpetitioned cases. Also, we could not develop a placement model for Arizona because there were too few status-offense cases involving placements to estimate the model. In addition, Utah's data file did not contain detention information; therefore, we could not estimate a detention model.

<sup>13</sup>The use of .2 (20 percent) was derived from criminological research on racial discrimination. (See app. III for further discussion.)

that females were less likely to be detained or placed than males because the juvenile justice system treated females' characteristics, e.g., referrals by the police, differently due to their gender. Our conclusions about gender bias are limited to aspects of the juvenile justice process for which we had data. See appendix III for a detailed explanation of the models and the methodology.

**Table 2: Gender-Bias Quotient Results Regarding Intake Decisions, Detentions, Adjudications, and Placements in Seven States**

State	Intake	Detention	Adjudication	Placement <sup>a</sup>
Arizona <sup>b</sup>	1.15	3.39	0.99	Not available <sup>c</sup>
California <sup>d</sup>	0.94	1.02	0.93	1.07
Florida	0.78	1.34	1.22	2.97
Missouri	0.96 <sup>e</sup>	0.98	1.02	0.85
Nebraska	Not available <sup>f</sup>	1.44	1.02	0.80
South Carolina	1.06	1.03	1.01	0.80
Utah	0.98	Not available <sup>g</sup>	1.00	0.83

<sup>a</sup>Our placement model covers only those cases formally adjudicated as status-offender cases.

<sup>b</sup>The NCJJ data for Arizona cover only Maricopa County, which represents about 57 percent of the juvenile population between the ages of 10 and 17.

<sup>c</sup>We were unable to develop a placement model for Arizona because the state's data file had an insufficient number of placed status-offender cases.

<sup>d</sup>The California data cover counties (Alameda, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Joaquin, and Ventura) that represent about 40 percent of the state's juvenile population between the ages of 10 and 17.

<sup>e</sup>Missouri data did not indicate which cases were handled formally.

<sup>f</sup>Nebraska intake data were not available for two of its largest counties.

<sup>g</sup>We were unable to develop a detention model for Utah because the state's data file did not contain detention information.

Source: GAO modeling using NCJJ state-specific juvenile court records from calendar years 1990 through 1991.

In measuring gender bias, we combined the effects of the individual variables to estimate the overall probabilities of intake decisions, detention, adjudication, and placement. By combining these effects to estimate gender bias, some variables may have had offsetting effects, regardless of whether the models showed gender bias. For example, in the Missouri intake results, which did not indicate gender bias, law enforcement and school referrals for females lowered their probability of

being petitioned, but urban courts increased the probability of being petitioned. These offsetting situations occurred relatively infrequently.

Our analysis showed that certain factors, such as offenders' prior offense history and source of referral, affected the status offenders' outcomes. For example, as would be expected, offenders' prior offense history generally affected their detention outcomes. As the number of prior offenses increased, so did the probability that the status offenders would be detained regardless of whether they were females or males. See appendix III for a discussion of the influence of such characteristics on the intake, detention, adjudication, and placement outcomes.

### Survey Responses of Probation Officers Revealed No Differences in Processing

Table 3 shows that the probation officers who responded to our survey did not perceive any differences in the way females and males with similar status-offense histories were processed. More specifically, of the responding probation officers, we estimated that

- 71.6 percent did not report any differences in the referral/arrest process,
- 79.1 percent did not report any differences in the intake process, and
- 70.5 percent did not report any differences in either treatment by the court or the length and type of disposition.

Regarding the detention process, 50.1 percent of the chief probation officers did not report any gender differences. However, another 41.8 percent of the chief probation officers reported "no basis" for answering this part of the question, thought the question not applicable, and/or did not answer the question.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup>All estimates to the population are subject to sampling errors. All estimates in this report are within 5 percentage points on either side of the estimate, with a confidence interval of 95 percent, unless otherwise noted. For more information, see appendix I.

**Table 3: Probation Officers' Responses to Survey Question Comparing the Processing of Female and Male Status Offenders**

Question 12: In your jurisdiction, what are the differences, if any, in the ways females and males with similar status offense histories are processed with respect to each of the following:	Percentage of responses		
	No difference	Some differences	Other responses (e.g., no basis, not applicable, or no response)
Referral/Arrest	71.6	9.2	19.2
Detention <sup>a</sup>	50.1	8.0	41.8
Intake	79.1	2.6 <sup>b</sup>	18.3
Treatment by the court	70.5	9.2	20.3
Length and type of disposition	70.5	6.6 <sup>b</sup>	22.9

Note: See appendix V, question 12, for a categorization of the responses.

<sup>a</sup>Total does not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

<sup>b</sup>Because of the small number of responses, the sampling errors were calculated differently (see app. I).

Source: GAO survey.

## Comparative Availability of Facilities and Services for Status Offenders Believed Similar

Generally, both our national survey respondents and the juvenile justice officials and facility representatives we interviewed in four states told us there were not any significant differences in the facilities and services available to female and male status offenders. However, both groups emphasized that they believed that more services were needed for status offenders, irrespective of gender.

## GAO National Survey Responses Indicated Equal Treatment Options

As table 4 shows, 44.4 percent of the chief probation officers who responded to our survey said that treatment options (facilities and services) were about equally available to detained female and male status offenders. However, more than one-third of the respondents—37.8 percent—reported “no basis” for answering this question, thought the question inapplicable, or did not answer the question. Therefore, about 70 percent of those officials who responded said that the services and facilities were about equal for detained female and male status offenders.

When the respondents reported a difference, the difference was generally related to the perception that there were more facilities available for males than females. Almost 16 percent of the respondents reported that facilities and services were either “somewhat more” or “much more” available for males than for females. In contrast, only 2 percent of the respondents said



that facilities and services were either "somewhat more" or "much more" available for females than males.

**Table 4: Probation Officers' Responses to Survey Question Comparing the Availability of Facilities and Services for Detained Status Offenders**

<b>Question 9a: Based on your experience, how would you describe the current availability of treatment options (facilities and services) for detained status offenders?</b>	<b>Percentage of responses</b>
Much more available for males	6.9 <sup>a</sup>
Somewhat more available for males	8.9
About equal for females and males	44.4
Somewhat more available for females	1.4 <sup>a</sup>
Much more available for females	0.6 <sup>a</sup>
Other responses (e.g., no basis, not applicable, or no response)	37.8
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Note: See appendix V, question 9a.

<sup>a</sup>Because of the small number of responses, the sampling errors were calculated differently (see app. I).

Source: GAO survey.

Further, many respondents indicated that the availability of facilities and services for status offenders perhaps would be more accurately described as being equally unavailable for females and males. For example, some respondents said that female and male status offenders had no treatment programs or facilities due to limited funding and resources. In addition, other respondents said that the existing services were inadequate to meet the needs of both genders. Four other respondents to our survey indicated that, even within an overall environment of limited resources for both genders, female status offenders had fewer services than males.

### Services for Female and Male Status Offenders in Selected Facilities Were Similar

As table 5 shows, we visited a total of 15 facilities—10 co-educational facilities and 5 serving only females or only males. Except for some health services not applicable to males (such as prenatal care), we generally did not find gender-based distinctions in the availability of counseling, educational, and medical services for females and males at each of the 10 co-educational facilities we visited. Officials at the other five facilities said that their programs were not gender-based and could be provided to either females or males.

OJJDP officials pointed out that providing similar services for both females and males may be equitable but may not result in meeting the specific needs of one gender.

**Table 5: List of 15 Facilities Visited (by Type, Name, Location, and Gender Served)**

Facility type	Facility	Location		Gender served
		State	County (urban or rural)	
Detention facility	Regional Juvenile Detention Center	Florida	Duval (urban)	Female and male
	Juvenile Detention Center	Kentucky	Fayette (urban)	Female and male
	Big Sandy Regional Detention Center	Kentucky	Johnson (rural)	Female and male
	Juvenile Detention Center	Texas	Bexar (urban)	Female and male
Shelter	Youth Crisis Center South	Florida	Duval (urban)	Female and male
	Interface Runaway Shelter	Florida	Alachua (rural)	Female and male
	Coleman House	Kentucky	Fayette (urban)	Female and male
	Second Mile Runaway Home	Maryland	Prince Georges (urban)	Female and male
	Walden Sierra, Inc.	Maryland	St. Mary's (rural)	Female and male
	Letot Center's Emergency Shelter	Texas	Dallas (urban)	Female and male
Group home	Bardstown Group Home for Boys	Kentucky	Jefferson (urban)	Male
	Project Respect Group Home for Girls	Kentucky	Fayette (urban)	Female
	Salvation Army Adolescent Treatment Center	Texas	Bexar (urban)	Female
	San Antonio Youth Residential for Females	Texas	Bexar (urban)	Female
Nonresidential program	Practical and Cultural Education Center for Girls	Florida	Duval (urban)	Female

Source: Developed by GAO from information provided by facility officials.

## Counseling Services

At the 10 co-educational facilities (4 secure detention centers and 6 shelters), we did not find gender-based distinctions in counseling services offered for female and male status offenders. Generally, the four secure detention facilities did not routinely provide counseling to females or males. Facility officials told us that youth who requested counseling or who displayed suicidal tendencies were referred to community health-care

providers. The officials added that their facilities basically were temporary holding centers for youth awaiting juvenile court processing and were not designed to provide treatment services. According to these officials, while many of the resident youth may need counseling and mental health services, the centers were not the appropriate facilities for providing these services.

At the six shelters, the resident female and male youth were provided weekly counseling services (individual, group, or both). Individual counseling, available at all six shelters, ranged from 2 hours to 6 hours per week. Group counseling, available at five of the shelters, ranged from 4 hours to 14 hours per week.

The other five facilities (four group homes and one nonresidential program), which served either females or males, also provided individual counseling (ranging from 1 hour to 4 hours per week) and group counseling (1 hour to 5 hours per week).

## Educational Services

At the 10 co-educational facilities, we did not find gender-based distinctions in the availability of educational services for female and male status offenders. Youth at these 10 facilities attended public schools or on-site schools, with 1 exception.<sup>15</sup> The four group homes, each serving either only females or only males, sent youth to local public schools, an on-site alternative school, or alternative schools operated by the state and the local public school district. The 15th facility (nonresidential program) was an alternative school and, therefore, provided education on-site.

## Medical Services

According to service providers at all 15 facilities we visited, females and males received needed medical services, either at the respective facility or from local community health-care providers.

Generally, we did not find gender-based distinctions in the availability (from either on-site or community sources) of medical care for females and males at the 10 co-educational facilities, except for services, such as gynecological services and prenatal care, which were not applicable to males. Admission physicals were the only gender-based difference we noted. At two of the female-only group homes, health examinations included testing (which could be refused at one of the homes) for sexually transmitted diseases, whereas, at similar male-only facilities operated by

<sup>15</sup>The Big Sandy Regional Detention Center (Johnson County, KY) did not have on-site educational services for youth who were not transported to the local public schools.

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the same organizations, such testing was not done unless requested by the males.

Only 5 of the 10 co-educational facilities, 4 detention facilities and 1 shelter, had on-site medical personnel. Each of these five facilities had a doctor on-site at least 1 day per week. Also, each of the four detention centers had a nurse on-site at least 5 days per week, and the shelter had a nurse on-site 3 days per week. Some of the on-site service providers told us that their facilities were often overcrowded and in need of additional medical staff. At two detention facilities, for example, officials told us that the on-site nurse could not fully treat all of the females and males on each day's sick list. According to the officials, the nurse at this facility had to select which patients to treat. The other five co-educational facilities (five shelters) did not have doctors or nurses on site. Residents of these facilities relied on parents, guardians, or, if necessary, facility staff to provide access to community health-care services.

The remaining five facilities—three group homes serving only females, one group home for only males, and the nonresidential program for females—generally did not have on-site medical personnel and, thus, relied on community health-care providers. Some officials at the shelters and group homes that did not have on-site medical personnel told us that such resources were needed for medical services. For instance, one official explained that counselors had to use their already limited counseling time to dispense medication and transport youth to doctors' offices.

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### Juvenile Justice System Perceived as Not Meeting Status Offenders' Service Needs

Juvenile court judges, detention officials, and service providers in the nine counties we visited said that more facilities and services were needed for both female and male status offenders. Some of the juvenile justice representatives and professional staff said that early intervention services were needed for first-time offenders to divert them from further involvement with the juvenile justice system. For example, some judges said that while not all status offenders become delinquent offenders, the majority of the juvenile delinquents appearing in their courts had a previous history of status offenses.

Most of the juvenile justice officials and service providers we interviewed told us that status offenders did not need gender-specific treatment or services, except for gynecological services and prenatal care for females. In fact, representatives from the female-only and male-only facilities said

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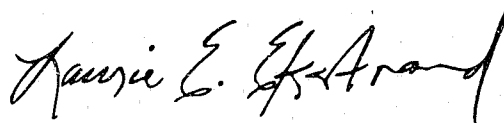
that their programs could be replicated to provide the same counseling and mental health services to status offenders of the opposite sex.<sup>16</sup> Other officials added that gender did not play a role in determining a youth's individual treatment needs because each youth had unique needs. Further, some service providers said that facilities should serve both females and males because the two genders would have to communicate and interact on a daily basis, such as they would in real-life situations.

Some service providers pointed out that advantages exist to having single-gender facilities because distractions or anxieties could be created when both genders participate in the same counseling and treatment programs. For example, a service provider at a female-only facility told us that many of the females had experienced some form of abuse by males. Thus, according to this provider, a female-only program was more conducive to helping the females work through their feelings and build self-esteem. Appendix IV provides more details about our visits to the selected facilities in the four case-study states.

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We are sending copies of this report to the Attorney General; the Administrator, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; the Director, Office of Management and Budget; and other interested parties. Copies will also be made available to others upon request.

Major contributors to this report are listed in appendix VI. If you have any questions about this report, please contact me on (202) 512-8777.



Laurie E. Ekstrand  
Associate Director, Administration  
of Justice Issues

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<sup>16</sup>Illustrations of this replication in Kentucky are the Project Respect Group Home for Girls and the Bardstown Group Home for Boys (see table 5). Both of these single-gender facilities were operated by the same nonprofit organization and provided similar treatment and services to the resident females and males.



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## Abbreviations

NCJJ	National Center for Juvenile Justice
OJJDP	Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention



# Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

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The 1992 reauthorization (P.L. 102-586) of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (P.L. 93-415) mandated that we study gender-bias issues in state juvenile justice systems. Specifically, we agreed with the Committees to

- compare the outcomes of intake decisions and frequency of detentions, adjudications, and out-of-home placements of female and male status offenders and
- compare the availability of facilities and services for female and male status offenders in selected jurisdictions.

In addressing these objectives, we reviewed relevant literature. Regarding the first objective, we analyzed the frequency of detentions, adjudications, and out-of-home placements of petitioned status offenders by gender at the national level, and we made comparisons within selected states.<sup>1</sup> Further, we analyzed intake decisions within selected states. Regarding the second objective, we visited a total of 15 facilities in 4 states. Finally, we obtained additional perspectives on these juvenile justice issues by mailing a survey to a national sample of county juvenile justice probation department officials.

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## Review of Relevant Literature

To develop an understanding of gender-bias issues associated with state juvenile justice systems, we reviewed relevant literature identified in bibliographies provided us by the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) and the Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). Our review of the literature aided us in defining gender bias and in designing models to conduct our analyses of intake decisions, detentions, adjudications, and out-of-home placements in selected states.

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<sup>1</sup>We used data that were housed in and made available by the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, which is maintained by NCJJ and supported by a grant from OJJDP. These data were originally collected by the Maricopa County, AZ, Juvenile Court Center; the Alameda County, CA, Probation Department; the Los Angeles County, CA, Probation Department; the San Francisco County, CA, Juvenile Probation Department; the San Joaquin County, CA, Probation Department; the County of Ventura, CA, Corrections Services Agency; the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services; the Missouri State Division of Children and Youth Services; the Nebraska Commission on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice; the Pennsylvania Center for Juvenile Justice Training and Research; the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice; and the Utah Juvenile Court. Neither the original data collectors nor NCJJ bear any responsibility for our analyses or interpretations of the data.

## National Data Comparing Petitioned Female and Male Status Offenders' Frequency of Detentions, Adjudications, and Placements

To develop national statistics comparing the frequency that female and male status offenders were detained, adjudicated, and placed, we used juvenile court data collected annually by NCJJ. Each year, NCJJ collects juvenile court case-level data from various states and jurisdictions and assigns weights to the data, which permits projecting the data to produce national estimates of cases disposed by all state juvenile justice systems.<sup>2</sup> OJJDP publishes the weighted data in its annual report entitled Juvenile Court Statistics.

Using NCJJ's data files (the National Juvenile Court Data Archive), we developed statistics for a 6-year period from calendar years 1986 to 1991.<sup>3</sup> More specifically, we developed national estimates of the gender-specific probabilities of detentions, adjudications, and out-of-home placements for petitioned status offenders by offense categories for the 6-year period and annually.

Our comparative analyses of NCJJ data have some significant limitations. For example, the NCJJ data did not represent the universe of status offenders. Rather, the data included only those status offenders who were petitioned to or otherwise handled more formally by the juvenile courts. Thus, the data did not include status offenders who were picked up, counseled, and/or released by the police. Nor did the data cover those juveniles who received informal dispositions from county juvenile department officials during intake screening. For example, intake officials may counsel and release the juveniles or divert them to social service agencies.

<sup>2</sup>In 1991, for example, the following 23 states provided juvenile court case-level data to NCJJ: Alabama, Arizona (Maricopa County only), Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. In 1990 and 1991, California reported data from several of its larger counties representing 40 percent of the state's youth population at risk. In addition, some jurisdictions in seven other states reported court case-level data that were used in generating the national estimates. In all, data from 1,504 jurisdictions covering 57 percent of the Nation's youth at risk were used to produce the 1991 national estimates. NCJJ's estimates of the number and characteristics of delinquency and petitioned status-offense cases disposed by juvenile courts were on the basis of the assumption that the characteristics of cases in counties that did not report juvenile court statistics were similar to those counties of similar size that did report statistics to NCJJ. The details of the estimation procedures can be found in OJJDP's annual report entitled Juvenile Court Statistics. NCJJ's national estimates were not generated by a probability sample. However, NCJJ has conducted tests of the validity of the national estimates by comparing their referral estimates to counts of referrals (as reported by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's annual Uniform Crime Reports) made by law-enforcement agencies to juvenile courts. NCJJ concluded that the data were generally reliable.

<sup>3</sup>At the time of our review, NCJJ did not have national statistics available for calendar year 1992 or later years.

Another significant limitation of our national-level analyses is that any differences in the resulting frequency and probability statistics (comparing female and male status offenders in reference to detentions, adjudications, and placements) cannot be used to draw interpretations or conclusions about either the presence or the absence of gender bias.<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of our review, we defined gender bias as differences in juvenile justice systems' outcomes (intake decisions, detentions, adjudications, and placements) of female and male status offenders who had similar characteristics, such as age, status offense, and offense history. Thus, because NCJJ's national data files contained insufficient information on prior offense histories and other variables relevant to judges' decisions in the cases, we could not use our national-level analyses to draw interpretations or conclusions about gender bias.

Despite these limitations, the national-level frequency and probability statistics provide a useful overview regarding petitioned status offenders.

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## Analyses of Intake Decisions, Detentions, Adjudications, and Placements in Selected States

While NCJJ's national data files did not contain sufficient information for directly analyzing gender-bias issues, some of the Center's state-specific files did have a wider range of variables (including prior offense histories) to permit such analyses. For example, in addition to gender and type of status offense, some of the variables relevant to our analyses were: the age of the youth at the time of referral to the juvenile justice system, the outcome or finding of the adjudicatory hearing, and whether the youth had any previous referrals and/or adjudications. Thus, to conduct more detailed analyses of intake decisions, detentions, adjudications, and placements, we selected the following 7 states from the total of 25 states that provide data to NCJJ: Arizona, California, Florida, Missouri, Nebraska, South Carolina, and Utah. In addition to geographical coverage, we considered the following factors in selecting these seven states.

- The states' juvenile justice systems reflected a diverse range of processes for handling youthful offenders.
- The states' data files contained a sufficient number of relevant variables to permit construction of models to test the respective state's juvenile justice system for indications of gender bias in the handling of similarly situated female and male status offenders.

For each of the seven states selected, we obtained a copy of NCJJ's computerized data files for calendar years 1990 and 1991, the most recent

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<sup>4</sup>National estimates for intake decisions were not available.

years for which consistent data were available.<sup>5</sup> Then, using the 1990 and 1991 data files for all status offenders, we constructed logistic regression<sup>6</sup> models for intake decisions. We used a class of models commonly used in criminological research to analyze these types of outcomes. For petitioned status offenders, we constructed logistic regression models to test for gender-based differences (if any) in three other aspects of juvenile justice processing. These models contained variables to measure offenders' characteristics.

First, we tested how the characteristics affected the probabilities associated with female and male status offenders' being detained before adjudication. Second, we tested how the characteristics affected the probabilities, by gender, of being formally adjudicated as a status offender. Third, we tested how the characteristics affected the probabilities of females' and males' receiving placement as a final disposition. However, we could not address possible gender bias elsewhere in the juvenile justice system because data did not exist. For example, the data did not include youths who were handled informally—that is, picked up, counseled, and/or released by the police or by county juvenile department intake officials. Appendix III presents the results of our regression analyses of intake decisions, detentions, adjudications, and placements.

To gain an understanding of the juvenile justice systems in the seven states in our analyses, we interviewed state officials in various jurisdictions within those states, including judges, prosecutors, and juvenile justice specialists. Those interviews covered many topics, including the referral process; the prosecution, adjudication, and disposition of juveniles; the juvenile justice systems in various jurisdictions; workload; and state laws as they related to the processing of juvenile offenders.

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<sup>5</sup>For trend purposes, additional data files (i.e., for years before 1990) would have been desirable; however, the 1990 and 1991 data files were the only years that had a sufficient range of variables common to all seven states to facilitate our planned analyses. For four states, we also obtained data for 1988 and 1989 to obtain juveniles' prior criminal history records.

<sup>6</sup>Logistic regression analysis is a widely accepted statistical methodology used when the dependent variable is qualitative, such as if a status offender is detained. Regression analysis identifies relationships between the dependent variable and two or more key variables, such as the gender and age of the juvenile, offender's current offense category, and prior offense categories and dispositions. (See app. III for a list of the dependent and independent variables.)

## Overview Comparisons of the Availability of Facilities and Services for Female and Male Status Offenders in Selected Jurisdictions

To develop comparative information about the availability of facilities and services for female and male status offenders, we visited a total of nine counties—generally two counties (a rural county and an urban county) within each of four states (Florida, Kentucky, Maryland, and Texas).<sup>7</sup> In judgmentally selecting these states, our primary consideration was that we wanted to visit juvenile justice jurisdictions that reflected various approaches for handling status offenders and/or provided a variety of facilities and services, including some facilities serving only females, some serving only males, and some serving both genders. Thus, in selecting states to visit, we first solicited suggestions from juvenile justice professionals with national or multijurisdiction experience. These professionals included, for example, OJJDP officials, as well as representatives of advocacy groups, such as the Coalition for Juvenile Justice and the National Girls' Caucus. Following are more specifics regarding our reasons for selecting each state.

- Florida had begun a process of privatizing services to status offenders by contracting with the Florida Network of Youth and Family Services, Inc., which operated residential shelters and nonresidential treatment and counseling sites throughout the state.<sup>8</sup> Also, according to OJJDP officials, Florida had a female-specific program (the Practical and Cultural Education Center for Girls) that had received national attention.
- Kentucky, in 1986, had enacted legislation providing for informal processing of juveniles involved in less-serious offenses. These juveniles may enter into diversion agreements, which impose conditions such as community service, counseling, curfew, and restitution.
- Maryland tries to divert status offenders from the juvenile justice system into nonresidential counseling programs operated by youth service bureaus, which are private, not-for-profit organizations under contract with the state's Department of Juvenile Services. Also, according to OJJDP officials, Maryland was one of only a handful of states that began planning for gender-specific services for juvenile offenders before such planning was required by federal legislation.<sup>9</sup>
- Texas is a populous state with a relatively large number of juveniles. According to 1990 census data, 3 of the 10 most populous U.S. cities are in

<sup>7</sup>We visited three counties in Kentucky (see table IV.1 in app. IV).

<sup>8</sup>The Florida Network of Youth and Family Services, Inc., is a not-for-profit association of agencies and individuals serving families and youth (ages 10 through 17), including runaways and those youth at risk of running away; dropping out of school; or becoming delinquent, abused, neglected, or abandoned. The Network's services include specialized counseling, safe temporary shelter, food, and clothing.

<sup>9</sup>The 1992 amendments to the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act require states applying for grants to submit plans (to OJJDP) that contain an analysis of available gender-specific services for females.

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Texas. We visited Dallas and San Antonio, which we selected on the basis of our available staff.

Generally, in deciding which counties to visit in each of the four states, a primary criterion we used was the relative volumes of status offenders referred to and/or detained by the local juvenile justice systems. We obtained referral and detention information by reviewing (1) periodic reports that county juvenile justice officials submit to the respective state's office of the governor and (2) each of the states' current 3-year plans submitted in conjunction with applications for formula-grant funding under the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. Using these data sources and considering suggestions of state juvenile justice specialists, we selected one urban and one rural county to visit in each of the four states, except in Texas, where we selected two urban counties—Dallas County and Bexar County. We selected two urban counties in Texas because we wanted to contrast different approaches for dealing with status offenders. For example, Dallas County had a separate juvenile probation facility (the Letot Center) specifically designated for only status offenders, while Bexar County had no such separately designated facilities. Also, each county had one of the nation's 10 most populous cities—Dallas and San Antonio.

Generally, in each of the selected counties, we interviewed local juvenile justice officials (judges, law-enforcement officers, detention facility officials, and others) to obtain overview perspectives on the availability of facilities and services for status offenders. Also, we visited facilities that the state and local officials identified as having services or being placement options for status offenders. In total, we visited 15 facilities—4 detention facilities, 6 shelters, 4 group homes, and 1 nonresidential program.<sup>10</sup>

At the facilities, we obtained information about the capacity, or number of beds available; genders served by offense category; extent of overcrowding, if applicable; and average lengths of stay. Also, we toured the facilities to obtain information on available counseling, educational, and medical services—that is, the services most relevant to the principal needs of status offenders. In addition, we interviewed the service providers (the professional staff responsible for providing counseling, educational, and medical services) at each of the facilities to obtain views on the treatment needs of status offenders, including views on the need for

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<sup>10</sup>The specific counties and facilities we visited in each of the four states are detailed in appendix IV (see table IV.1).



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gender-specific services. We did not verify the information facility officials gave to us, nor did we try to evaluate or compare services provided. The results of our visits cannot be projected to other counties and facilities within the respective states, and comparisons should not be made between states.

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## Survey Sent to a National Sample of Probation Department Officials

We conducted a mail survey of county probation department officials nationwide to obtain their views on issues concerning gender bias. At our request, NCJJ gave us a list of all juvenile probation departments in the United States.<sup>11</sup> NCJJ identified 1,410 officials whose titles indicated that they were the main officials in juvenile probation departments. Titles on the list included "chief probation officer," "court services director," and "court administrator." We referred to all such individuals as "chief probation officers." The list of 1,410 officials was developed by eliminating duplicates in counties listing more than one individual as the chief probation officer. NCJJ then selected a random sample of 500 such officials for our sample. Although we sent our survey to the individual listed, some questionnaires were actually completed by other individuals in their offices (see app. V). The survey was designed to (1) identify differences in relationship to gender in the juvenile justice system's processing of status offenders and (2) obtain perspectives on the availability of facilities and services for status offenders. By using a national sample, we were able to project the results of our study to a population of 1,249 chief probation officers.

We designed and pretested the survey in March and April 1994 and mailed it to the 500 randomly selected officials in May 1994. As needed, we made some follow-up inquiries by mail and/or telephone to help ensure an adequate response rate. We determined that 57 questionnaires had been sent to offices that did not handle status offenders; therefore, we eliminated these offices from our sample and adjusted the universe, accordingly. Our resulting study population was 1,249 chief probation officers, and our valid sample consisted of 443 such individuals. We received a total of 349 useable responses out of the 443 surveys mailed, for a response rate of 79 percent.

All such samples are subject to sampling error. All percentage estimates noted in this report are within plus or minus 5 percentage points, using a 95-percent confidence interval, with the following exceptions. The

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<sup>11</sup>According to NCJJ officials, the list they gave us covered more than 99 percent of all juvenile probation departments in the nation.

following calculations either exceed the 5-percent range or are calculated using a Poisson distribution because of the small number of responses. All sampling errors reported here use the 95-percent confidence interval.

- Estimate referred to as “About 70 percent” on pages 3 and 15: 71.4 percent, sampling error is 5.8 percent.
- Estimate of 2.6 percent in table 3: confidence interval for the percentage is from 1.5 percent to 4.2 percent.
- Estimate of 6.6 percent in table 3: confidence interval for the percentage is from 5.0 percent to 8.6 percent.
- Estimate of 6.9 percent in table 4: confidence interval for the percentage is from 5.2 percent to 8.9 percent.
- Estimate of 1.4 percent in table 4: confidence interval for the percentage is from .7 percent to 2.8 percent.
- Estimate of .6 percent in table 4: confidence interval for the percentage is from .2 percent to 1.8 percent.
- Estimate of 2 percent on page 16: confidence interval for the percentage is from 1.1 percent to 3.5 percent.

In addition to the reported sampling errors, the practical difficulties of conducting any survey may introduce nonsampling errors. For example, variations in the wording of questions, the sources of information available to the respondents, or the types of people who do not respond can lead to somewhat different results. We included steps in both the data collection and data analysis stages for the purpose of minimizing such nonsampling errors. For example, we pretested the survey on members of the target population. All returned surveys were manually edited, double-keyed, and verified for accurate data entry, and all computer analyses were checked by a second independent analyst.

# National Data Comparing Petitioned Female and Male Status Offenders

According to the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) data,<sup>1</sup> 500,620 status-offense cases were petitioned to juvenile courts in the United States during the 6-year period from 1986 to 1991. As mentioned in appendix I, because NCJJ's national data files contained insufficient information on prior histories and other variables relevant to judges' decisions in the cases, our national-level analyses cannot be used to draw interpretations or conclusions about either the presence or the absence of gender bias. Of the total petitioned status-offense cases, 206,756 cases (41.3 percent) involved females and 293,864 cases (58.7 percent) involved males. These proportions were fairly consistent across the 6 years. (See tables II.1 and II.2.)

## Running Away Appears to Be More a Female-Related Status-Offense Category and Liquor Offense More a Male-Related Category

In terms of gender distinctions, two specific offense categories with noticeable differences in the frequency (number) of female and male status-offense cases petitioned to juvenile court were running away and liquor offense. Running away appeared to be a predominantly female category. For the 6-year period shown in tables II.1 and II.2, females were involved in 61.9 percent of the total 83,000 petitioned running away cases, and males were involved in the other 38.1 percent. In contrast, liquor offense appeared to be a predominantly male category. Of the total 156,317 petitioned liquor offense cases during 1986 through 1991, males were involved in 74.3 percent of the cases, and females were involved in the other 25.7 percent.

**Table II.1: Number of Status-Offense Cases Petitioned to Juvenile Courts by Offense Category, Calendar Years 1986-1991**

Status-offense category	Calendar year						Total
	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	
Liquor offense	24,124	25,112	25,870	23,882	29,049	28,280	156,317
Running away	15,580	14,569	12,873	12,168	12,934	14,876	83,000
Truancy	21,698	21,009	21,299	20,950	24,602	25,986	135,544
Ungovernable	16,652	14,534	13,405	11,787	11,491	11,228	79,097
Other offenses	6,314	6,799	7,140	7,871	8,822	9,716	46,662
All offenses	84,368	82,023	80,587	76,658	86,898	90,086	500,620

Source: Developed by GAO from NCJJ's National Juvenile Court Data Archive.

<sup>1</sup>NCJJ data are the source of all data in this appendix. These data represent "cases" and not "individuals." An individual youth may be involved in more than one status-offense case during any given time period; that is, the individual may be a repeat offender.

**Appendix II**  
**National Data Comparing Petitioned Female**  
**and Male Status Offenders**

**Table II.2: Percentage of Status-Offense Cases Petitioned to Juvenile Courts by Gender, Calendar Years 1986-1991**

Status offense (category and gender)	Calendar year						Total
	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	
Liquor offense							
Female	23.4	25.7	24.1	26.0	27.1	27.5	25.7
Male	76.6	74.3	75.9	74.0	72.9	72.5	74.3
Running away							
Female	61.8	62.2	62.2	61.9	62.2	61.0	61.9
Male	38.2	37.8	37.8	38.1	37.8	39.0	38.1
Truancy							
Female	46.6	44.8	46.2	46.0	45.6	46.4	46.0
Male	53.4	55.2	53.8	54.0	54.4	53.6	54.0
Ungovernable							
Female	49.8	51.1	48.7	48.2	45.5	47.2	48.6
Male	50.2	48.9	51.3	51.8	54.5	52.8	51.4
Other offenses							
Female	29.0	31.8	32.0	31.8	32.0	29.5	31.0
Male	71.0	68.2	68.0	68.2	68.0	70.5	69.0
All offenses							
Female	42.1	42.1	40.8	41.2	40.5	41.2	41.3
Male	57.9	57.9	59.2	58.8	59.5	58.8	58.7

Source: Developed by GAO from NCJJ's National Juvenile Court Data Archive.

## Probabilities That Petitioned Status Offense Cases Involved Detention

During 1986 through 1991, of the total 500,620 status offense cases petitioned to juvenile courts, 10.7 percent (53,748 cases) involved secure detention of the alleged offender before disposition.<sup>2</sup> Of the total detention cases, 43.4 percent (23,326 cases) involved females and 56.6 percent (30,422 cases) involved males.

Table II.3 presents the results of our probability analyses regarding the 53,748 cases involving secure detention during 1986 through 1991. Generally, the probabilities, or percent chances, for females and males within each respective offense category were similar. For example, during the 6-year period shown, a female status offender petitioned for a liquor offense had a 4.96-percent chance of being detained, compared with a

<sup>2</sup>As defined in the glossary of terms applicable to NCJJ data, secure detention is the "placement of a youth in a restrictive facility between referral to court intake and case disposition." However, NCJJ's national-level data do not indicate the period or length of detention.

**Appendix II**  
**National Data Comparing Petitioned Female**  
**and Male Status Offenders**

6.37-percent chance for a male offender.<sup>3</sup> For most offenses, the probability of being detained decreased for both males and females between 1986 and 1991. For example, the probability of female runaways' being detained decreased from about 33 percent in 1986 to about 13 percent in 1991; for males, the percentage dropped from 38 percent to 23 percent.

**Table II.3: Comparative Chance (by Status-Offense Category and Gender) of Petitioned Status Offenders' Being Detained Before Disposition by Juvenile Courts, Calendar Years 1986-1991**

Status offense (category and gender)	Percent chance by calendar year						Combined probability, 1986-1991
	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	
Liquor offense							
Female	7.95	6.44	4.55	2.35	5.81	3.10	4.96
Male	6.48	7.15	5.26	5.86	7.09	6.32	6.37
Running away							
Female	32.61	31.27	23.39	19.25	13.80	12.86	22.54
Male	37.95	36.41	28.13	23.03	18.94	22.86	28.28
Truancy							
Female	6.26	4.76	2.59	1.98	2.04	2.55	3.31
Male	6.20	6.00	3.25	2.54	2.72	3.01	3.90
Ungovernable							
Female	18.94	18.14	14.26	9.11	8.65	7.84	13.61
Male	19.30	18.46	14.53	11.11	9.20	9.29	14.10
Other offenses							
Female	19.42	18.55	18.37	10.90	17.37	18.12	16.99
Male	9.25	14.07	19.44	13.22	22.36	20.89	17.06

Source: Developed by GAO from NCJJ's National Juvenile Court Data Archive.

<sup>3</sup>Statistically speaking, the numbers presented in tables II.3, II.4, and II.5 represent conditional probabilities as percentages. That is, numbers represent the probability of detention given that a case was petitioned or handled formally by the juvenile courts. These probabilities are reported separately by gender and by offense category. For example, the conditional probability of detention for females referred for liquor violations is 4.96 percent. In other words, females who committed a liquor offense and were petitioned to the juvenile courts during calendar years 1986 through 1991 had a 4.96-percent chance of being detained. The following formula shows the actual calculation of this probability:  $1,993.3/40,219.7$  equals 4.96 percent. In this formula, which covers combined data for the 6-year period, 1,993 is the total number of liquor-offense cases involving females who were detained, and 40,220 is the total number of liquor-offense cases involving females. This applies to all subsequent tables in this appendix.

## Probabilities That Petitioned Status Offenders Were Formally Adjudicated

During 1986 through 1991, of the total 500,620 status-offense cases petitioned to juvenile courts, 62.0 percent (310,363 cases) were formally adjudicated as status offenders. In these 310,363 cases, the adjudicatory hearings resulted in formal findings or determinations of status-offense conduct.<sup>4</sup> Of the 310,363 adjudicated cases, 40.3 percent (124,923 cases) involved females and 59.7 percent (185,440 cases) involved males.

Table II.4 presents the results of our probability analyses regarding the 310,363 adjudicated cases during 1986 through 1991. Generally, the adjudication probabilities for females and males within each respective offense category were comparatively similar. For example, during the 6-year period shown, a female status offender petitioned for a liquor offense had a 57.34-percent chance of being adjudicated, compared with a 59.69-percent chance for a male offender.

**Table II.4: Comparative Chance (by Status-Offense Category and Gender) of Petitioned Status Offenders' Being Formally Adjudicated by Juvenile Courts, Calendar Years 1986-1991**

Status offense (category and gender)	Percent chance by calendar year						Combined probability, 1986-1991
	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	
Liquor offense							
Female	53.53	58.70	57.27	56.33	55.38	61.83	57.34
Male	60.19	57.88	58.98	57.78	59.50	63.40	59.69
Running away							
Female	55.03	53.06	52.11	47.08	43.27	42.68	49.04
Male	59.42	56.09	54.87	51.50	47.32	45.12	52.49
Truancy							
Female	69.97	68.21	67.64	66.23	65.43	67.75	67.51
Male	73.45	70.42	68.25	67.79	68.41	68.94	69.51
Ungovernable							
Female	68.95	67.16	63.60	63.93	63.07	67.58	65.97
Male	71.53	69.63	68.32	67.74	65.41	66.66	68.43
Other offense							
Female	64.33	68.71	60.59	67.69	57.28	65.82	63.89
Male	57.31	63.97	66.49	67.55	64.51	66.62	64.68

Source: Developed by GAO from NCJJ's National Juvenile Court Data Archive.

<sup>4</sup>Juvenile courts conducted an adjudicatory hearing in each of the total (500,620) petitioned cases. As a result of these hearings, youth in 310,363 of the cases were formally determined to be (and were processed as) status offenders. In the other 190,257 cases, the courts decided not to formally adjudicate the youth as status offenders.

## Probabilities That Adjudicated Status Offenders Received an Out-of-Home Disposition

During 1986 through 1991, of the total 310,363 adjudicated status-offense cases in the United States, 18.3 percent (56,725 cases) resulted in out-of-home placement dispositions for the offenders.<sup>5</sup> Of these 56,725 cases, 42.4 percent (24,077 cases) involved females and 57.6 percent (32,648 cases) involved males.

Table II.5 presents the results of our probability analyses regarding the 56,725 out-of-home disposition cases during 1986 through 1991. Here again, the probabilities, or percentage chances, for females and males within each respective offense category were comparatively similar. For example, during the 6-year period shown, a petitioned female status offender adjudicated in the running away category had a 31.25-percent chance of receiving an out-of-home disposition, compared with a 34.68-percent chance for a petitioned male.

**Table II.5: Comparative Chance (by Status-Offense Category and Gender) of Formally Adjudicated Status Offenders' Receiving Out-of-Home Dispositions by Juvenile Courts, Calendar Years 1986-1991**

Status offense (category and gender)	Percent chance by calendar year						Combined probability, 1986-1991
	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	
Liquor offense							
Female	6.17	6.79	7.49	5.76	4.41	4.24	5.68
Male	8.45	8.65	7.87	8.80	8.90	7.96	8.42
Running away							
Female	33.49	36.03	29.46	29.60	27.20	29.30	31.25
Male	38.42	42.95	34.18	23.94	29.41	34.85	34.68
Truancy							
Female	10.27	10.28	8.17	8.98	9.34	8.17	9.17
Male	10.07	12.60	11.28	9.95	9.77	8.80	10.35
Ungovernable							
Female	31.69	34.31	32.21	30.75	31.45	31.58	32.11
Male	31.95	33.79	31.40	33.53	36.74	28.82	32.68
Other offenses							
Female	29.92	29.53	35.91	33.91	32.19	26.95	31.28
Male	25.79	30.09	31.91	41.16	36.29	26.57	32.15

Source: Developed by GAO from NCJJ's National Juvenile Court Data Archive.

<sup>5</sup>Our analyses of dispositions focused on out-of-home placements rather than other disposition alternatives, such as dismissal or probation.

# Technical Discussion of Gender-Bias Models

This appendix describes our research to measure gender bias in the case processing of status offenders in four juvenile justice system outcomes. These outcomes were: (1) the intake decision to petition status offenders to juvenile court versus the decision to handle them informally; (2) the decision to detain petitioned status offenders securely prior to an adjudicatory hearing; (3) the outcome of an adjudicatory hearing; and (4) the decision to place adjudicated status offenders out-of-home in secure or nonsecure placements. We analyzed 1990 and 1991 juvenile court data from up to seven states or counties within selected states<sup>1</sup> for each of the four outcomes. We measured gender bias in these four outcomes as the discrepancy or gap between females' actual outcomes and the outcomes that they would have received had they been treated as males were treated.

More specifically, we used juvenile court case-level data to estimate gender-specific logistic regression equations of the relationships between each of the four outcomes and case characteristics. That is, for female and male status offenders, we estimated separate regressions for whether (1) a case was petitioned at intake, (2) a case petitioned at intake was detained, (3) a petitioned case was adjudicated, and (4) an adjudicated case was placed out-of-home.

We included as independent or explanatory variables in our regressions three types of case characteristics. These characteristics were: (1) offense-related characteristics, such as current offense and prior offense history; (2) justice-system variables, such as the source of referral to the juvenile court, the location of the court, and, for the adjudication and placement outcomes, whether the case was detained during its processing; and (3) offender characteristics, such as age and race. The variables in the final models were selected from a broader set of variables using appropriate statistical techniques. The broader set of variables was identified from the literature on gender bias, but it was limited to those variables actually available in a given state's database.

We estimated the separate logistic regressions by gender, to derive gender-specific estimates of the juvenile justice systems' treatment of

<sup>1</sup>The states included Arizona, California, Florida, Missouri, Nebraska, South Carolina, and Utah. The data from Arizona were limited to cases processed in Maricopa County. The data from California came from five counties: Alameda, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Joaquin, and Ventura. Two of the largest counties in Nebraska did not report nonpetitioned cases. Therefore, we did not analyze the intake decisions in Nebraska.



females' and males' characteristics.<sup>2</sup> We took these estimates of the systems' treatment of males' characteristics and applied them to females' average characteristics to predict females' outcomes if their characteristics were treated equal to males'.<sup>3</sup> We defined as gender bias the gap between these two sets of outcomes—i.e., those models predicted for females versus those that we estimated would have occurred had females been treated as males.

In general, we found that females received outcomes that were similar to the ones they would have received if their average characteristics had been treated like males' characteristics. In only 6 of the 25 models, across the 4 outcomes in the 7 states that we analyzed, did we find outcomes that we characterize as evidence of gender bias.

Across states, but within case-processing outcomes, we found some similarities and some differences in the variables that were associated with the outcomes. For example, prior offense history tended to be strongly and positively associated with each of the four outcomes across the states (that had variables measuring prior offense history). However, the effects of other characteristics on particular outcomes were not consistent across states. For example, whether a case was referred to the courts by law-enforcement agencies was positively associated with the likelihood of detention in Arizona, California, and Nebraska; but it had no effect on the likelihood of detention in Florida, Missouri, and South Carolina. The models alone do not explain why these outcomes may happen. For example, the difference between states may be due to differences in police procedures, police practices, or laws.

We found similarities and differences across the states in the characteristics of females and males who were processed by their juvenile justice systems. Across states, males tended to have more prior contacts with the juvenile justice system than females, and males also tended to be slightly more likely to be referred to intake by law-enforcement agencies than females. Also across the states, we found gender differences in the types of offenses for which status offenders were referred to juvenile courts. There tended not to be differences between males and females on the basis of age and race.

Finally, within and across states and outcomes, we found some gender differences in the courts' treatment of individual characteristics.

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<sup>2</sup>We followed the specification adopted by Samuel L. Myers, Jr., in "Statistical Tests of Discrimination," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* (Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 191 to 218, 1985).

<sup>3</sup>The method we used to estimate gender bias is discussed in more detail later in this appendix.

Specifically, we found cases in which variables had opposite effects on the likelihood of an outcome for females than on the likelihood of that same outcome for males. For example, in California, females referred to the court by law-enforcement agencies were less likely to be petitioned to juvenile court than females referred by other sources; however, males referred to the courts by law-enforcement agencies were more likely to be petitioned than males referred by other sources. In general, however, the direction of the effects of variables were consistent between the females' and males' equations. That is, the same variables that increased or decreased the likelihood of a particular outcome for females also tended to increase or decrease the likelihood of that particular outcome for males. In addition, we had cases in which a variable influenced an outcome for one gender, but not the other gender.

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## Scope of the Analysis

We analyzed calendar year 1990 and 1991 juvenile court case-level data for up to seven states for each of four case processing outcomes. The outcomes were (1) whether a case was petitioned by intake staff, such as juvenile probation officers, to juvenile court for more formal handling or hearing by a judge; (2) whether a case petitioned to juvenile court was detained before its formal hearing;<sup>4</sup> (3) whether petitioned cases were adjudicated as status offenders; and (4) whether adjudicated cases were placed out-of-home.

Table III.1 reports the number of cases used in the analysis for each stage. Table III.2 reports the proportion of female cases in each stage. The number of cases referred in table III.1 represents the total sample of cases coming into the juvenile justice systems in each state, that is, cases referred from law-enforcement officers, schools, family, social service agencies, and other sources. From the cases referred, a subset is petitioned at intake to juvenile court (the number petitioned). Of those petitioned, a subset is detained (the number detained), and a subset is adjudicated as status offenders (the number adjudicated). Finally, of those cases adjudicated, a subset is placed out-of-home (the number placed).

The data in table III.1 show that the number of cases referred to the respective juvenile justice systems ranged from almost 41,000 in Missouri to about 8,700 in the 5 California counties. The number of cases processed at each of the other stages—detention, adjudication, and placement—also varied across the states.

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<sup>4</sup>In general, the data did not contain measures on the length of time cases were detained.

Table III.2 shows the proportion of females at each stage for each state. These proportions varied by outcomes and states. For example, in Utah, about 30 percent of the cases referred to the juvenile courts were females, whereas, in South Carolina, about 49 percent of the cases referred were females. Similar ranges and variability across the states occurred in other stages of processing.

**Table III.1: Number of Status-Offender Cases Referred to Intake, Petitioned to Juvenile Court, Detained, Adjudicated, and Placed Out-of-Home, by State, 1990-1991**

State	Cases referred	Cases petitioned	Cases detained	Cases adjudicated	Cases placed
Arizona <sup>a</sup>	11,801	847	67	370	14
California <sup>b</sup>	8,757	910	97	570	255
Florida	20,429	3,294	162	875	138
Missouri	40,986	4,822	740	3,843	1,394
Nebraska	n/a <sup>c</sup>	2,489	156	2,245	393
South Carolina	10,576	4,715	120	4,259	158
Utah	20,399	6,109	n/a <sup>d</sup>	4,980	192

<sup>a</sup>Arizona data were for Maricopa County only.

<sup>b</sup>California data were for five counties—Alameda, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Joaquin, and Ventura.

<sup>c</sup>Two of the largest counties in Nebraska did not report the number of cases handled informally; therefore, we did not report the total number referred.

<sup>d</sup>Utah did not report whether cases were detained.

Source: GAO analysis of NCJJ data.

**Table III.2: Proportion of Status-Offender Cases That Were Female Cases Referred to Intake, Petitioned to Juvenile Court, Detained, Adjudicated, and Placed Out-Of-Home, by State, 1990-1991**

State	Cases referred	Cases petitioned	Cases detained	Cases adjudicated	Cases placed
Arizona <sup>a</sup>	.3381	.5419	.2836	.5378	.2143
California <sup>b</sup>	.3251	.3593	.1753	.3684	.3098
Florida	.4523	.3257	.2778	.3143	.3571
Missouri	.4024	.3932	.3797	.3872	.4060
Nebraska	n/a <sup>c</sup>	.4210	.4182	.3737	.4733
South Carolina	.4898	.4674	.5000	.4628	.5127
Utah	.3040	.2734	n/a <sup>d</sup>	.2707	.2760

<sup>a</sup>Arizona data were for Maricopa County only.

<sup>b</sup>California data were for five counties—Alameda, Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Joaquin, and Ventura.

<sup>c</sup>Two of the largest counties in Nebraska did not report the number of cases handled informally; therefore, we did not report the total number referred.

<sup>d</sup>Utah did not report whether cases were detained.

Source: GAO analysis of NCJJ data.

In table III.3, we report the gender-specific aggregate probabilities for each of our four decision points by state. The following probabilities were defined:

- the probability of being petitioned at intake equals the number of cases petitioned to juvenile court divided by the number referred to the intake office,
- the probability of secure detention equals the number of petitioned cases detained securely divided by the number of petitioned cases,
- the probability of adjudication equals the number of petitioned cases adjudicated as status offenders divided by the number of petitioned cases, and
- the probability of placement equals the number of adjudicated cases receiving an out-of-home placement divided by the number of adjudicated cases.

**Appendix III**  
**Technical Discussion of Gender-Bias Models**

**Table III.3: Gender-Specific Probabilities of Petition, Detention, Adjudication, and Out-of-Home Placement, by State, 1990-1991**

State	Gender	Petition	Detention	Adjudication	Placement
Arizona	Female	.1150	.0414	.4335	.0151
	Male	.0497	.1237	.4407	.0643
California	Female	.1149	.0520	.6422	.3762
	Male	.0986	.1372	.6175	.4889
Florida	Female	.1161	.0419	.2563	.0836
	Male	.1985	.0527	.2701	.1917
Missouri	Female	.1150	.1482	.7848	.3804
	Male	.1195	.1569	.8048	.3516
Nebraska	Female	n/a <sup>a</sup>	.0544	.8960	.2737
	Male	n/a <sup>a</sup>	.0687	.9063	.1792
South Carolina	Female	.4255	.0272	.8943	.0411
	Male	.4653	.0239	.9112	.0336
Utah	Female	.2693	n/a <sup>a</sup>	.8072	.0393
	Male	.3127	n/a <sup>a</sup>	.8182	.0383

<sup>a</sup>Not available.

Source: GAO analysis of NCJJ data.

As in table III.1, table III.3 shows that there was a wide variability across states in the probabilities at each stage. There were also gender differences within states in the probabilities at particular stages. For example, the probability of being petitioned at intake to juvenile court for females ranged from about 11 percent in Arizona, California, Florida, and Missouri to about 42 percent in South Carolina. Within states, there were gender differences in the probability of being (1) petitioned at intake, in Arizona and Utah; (2) detained, in Arizona and California; (3) adjudicated, in Nebraska; and (4) placed, in Arizona and Nebraska.

Alone, differences in these aggregate probabilities did not reveal gender bias. The probabilities did not account for gender-specific differences in the distribution of case characteristics that were associated with each of the outcomes. The presence or absence of gender differences in the probabilities may mask gender differences in case characteristics or gender differences in the manner in which the respective juvenile justice systems treated the characteristics. Gender differences in the treatment of characteristics could lead to gender bias in outcomes. For example, the absence of a large gender difference in the probability that cases were petitioned at intake to the court in Missouri (.1195 for males as compared

to .1150 for females) could mask gender bias or gender differences in treatment. If, for example, intake offices in Missouri were more likely to petition male liquor offenders than female liquor offenders, but female liquor-law violators comprised a larger portion of the sample of female cases, then the aggregate probabilities of being petitioned at intake may mask the difference in treatment on similar characteristics.

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## Technical Aspects of Estimating and Measuring Gender Bias in Juvenile Court Outcomes

We measured gender bias as the gap or discrepancy between females' outcomes as determined by their average characteristics and females' outcomes under the assumption that their average characteristics were treated the same as males. We devised a measure—the gender-bias quotient—to summarize the degree to which these two sets of outcomes differed.

The gender-bias quotients were developed from the results of the gender-specific regressions of each of the four outcomes. In general, we estimated separate models for females and males using the case characteristics as predictors or independent variables.<sup>5</sup> Upon estimating the regressions, we produced parameter estimates of the influence on a dependent variable of each of the independent variables. For each outcome, we had two sets of parameter estimates, one for females and one for males.

We used the parameter estimates and the case characteristics for females and males to construct the gender-bias quotients. To do so, we calculated two sets of predicted average probabilities for females. The first predicted probability we called the “model probabilities.” These were the predicted average probabilities for females for each outcome, e.g., the probability of being petitioned to juvenile court. The model probabilities were calculated using the mean or average characteristics of females in the sample. To compute the model probabilities, we multiplied the female parameter estimates for each independent variable by the respective means of the independent variables for females. We summed across these products and transformed the result into a probability to produce the model probabilities.<sup>6</sup>

The second probability we calculated was the “equal treatment” probability. We followed a similar procedure as above. However, in this

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<sup>5</sup>The details about the regression specifications and the measures of the independent variables are discussed below.

<sup>6</sup>The details of this procedure are discussed in the next section.

case, we multiplied the parameter estimates for males by the average characteristics of females, summed the products, and transformed the result into the "equal treatment" probabilities. The ratio of the equal treatment to the model probabilities yielded the gender-bias quotient.

The gender-bias quotient measures the extent to which females' outcomes diverge from males' outcomes if case characteristics were treated equally. The gender-bias quotient is an aggregate measure in that it is produced by summing across the effects of different variables. It is possible, therefore, that the aggregate gender-bias quotients may show little or no gender bias, but that there may be gender differences in treatment on particular variables. The results of our regression analysis enabled us to identify situations where there were differences in treatment on particular variables but no aggregate gender bias, as measured by the gender-bias quotients.

Further, the method we used to construct the gender-bias quotients takes into account two sets of influences on each of the four case-processing outcomes. The first influence is the differences in the average characteristics of female and male status offenders across all cases. The second influence is the differences in how females' and males' characteristics were treated. Discrepancies between the two sets of predicted probabilities that comprise the gender-bias quotients arising from the first set of influences are not indicators of gender bias; those discrepancies arising from the second set are indicators.

The distinction between these influences stems from the fact that the outcomes we reviewed—petitioned at intake, detention, adjudication, and placement—may be determined by a number of variables, such as current offense, prior offense history, age, and race. If some variables had larger influences on these outcomes than others and the variables with larger influences were correlated with gender, then there would be gender differences in these outcomes. Such differences would not be characterized as gender bias, however, because they are explained by the gender differences in the distribution of case characteristics. Failure to control for gender differences in case characteristics may lead to the incorrect inference that there is gender bias in the outcomes, when, in fact, what has been observed is gender differences in the distribution of variables associated with outcomes.

On the other hand, estimated differences in the way the juvenile justice system evaluates females' and males' characteristics, apart from the

distribution of these characteristics across cases, would indicate gender bias. That is, differences in the magnitude or direction of the influence of variables between females and males, regardless of the distribution of these variables between females and males, indicate that there is gender bias.

For example, suppose, regardless of gender, that the probability of being detained before adjudication increases with the number of prior contacts with the juvenile justice system. Everything else being equal, if a larger proportion of the sample of males had prior contacts, or if males had more prior contacts on the average than did females, then one would expect the probability of detention to be higher for males than females. This type of result would not indicate gender bias.

However, if males had as many prior contacts with the juvenile justice system as females, but males with prior contacts were more likely than females with prior contacts to be detained, all else being equal, then gender differences in the probability of detention arising from this situation would indicate gender bias.

The methodology we employed enabled us to distinguish between these two sources of influences on the outcomes we analyzed. We were able to (1) evaluate the extent to which the distribution of characteristics differed between females and males and (2) measure whether there were gender differences in the juvenile justice systems' treatment of these characteristics.

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## Modeling Strategy for Estimating Gender Bias

To assess gender bias we estimated separate regressions for females and males for each of the four decision outcomes in the seven states. We fit the regressions on a state-by-state basis using variables that measured case characteristics in each state's data set. We imposed as few restrictions as possible on our representations of each state's juvenile justice system; in other words, each state's regressions may have had a different number of variables.

The four dependent variables in our analysis—whether a case was petitioned to juvenile court, detained, adjudicated as a status offense, or placed out-of-home—were dichotomous. Our ultimate interest was in the gender-specific probabilities of status offenders' being petitioned at intake, detained, adjudicated, and placed. This posed two problems. First, the dichotomous dependent variables violated the assumptions underlying the



classical, or linear, regression model. Specifically, the errors were heteroskedastic. Second, we wanted to use the regression results to predict aggregate, gender-specific probabilities for our outcomes, rather than simply predict the outcomes in individual cases.

The problems posed by the nature of the dependent variables and the need to estimate probabilities were solved by using a logistic specification for the regressions. This specification is commonly chosen by criminologists who analyze data containing dichotomous outcomes, such as whether a case was convicted.

Using a logistic specification to estimate the parameters, we took the following three steps to estimate parameters and calculate predicted probabilities. First, by state, we estimated the separate regressions for each of the four dependent variables. We included specific variables in the regressions by assessing the adequacy of the models both in terms of the individual variables and from the point of view of the overall fit of the model to the data. In general, we sought to build the most parsimonious models consistent with the data, but we also attempted to include theoretically relevant variables—such as the type of status offense—where possible.<sup>7</sup>

Second, we used the regressions to generate the first set of predicted probabilities for females and males for each of the four outcomes. We labeled these probabilities “p(1),” that is, “model probabilities.” These probabilities were calculated from the gender-specific parameter estimates of the influence of case characteristics on outcomes and the gender-specific distribution of case characteristics. Specifically, we multiplied the means<sup>8</sup> of females’ characteristics by the parameter estimates from the female equations, and we summed across the products to estimate the logit of the probability of interest. These were transformed into estimated probabilities by the formula:

$$p = e^{\text{logit}(p)} / (1 + e^{\text{logit}(p)})$$

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<sup>7</sup>For an approach to model building and assessing goodness of fit, see Applied Logistic Regression, David W. Hosmer and Stanley Lemeshow (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1989).

<sup>8</sup>Using the means of the independent variables was one option for estimating probabilities. Other options included selecting points along the distribution of a variable.

In this formula, "p" is the predicted probability of an outcome, e.g., the probability of petitioned at intake; "e" refers to the operation of exponentiating; and "logit(p)" is the estimated logit of the probability of the particular outcome. The logit was evaluated at the mean levels of the variables in the regression equation. These probabilities, the model probabilities, indicated how females and males, respectively, were treated by the courts on their average characteristics.

Third, we used the parameter estimates from the males' equations to estimate outcomes for females if they were treated in the same way as males. These probabilities were labeled "p(2)" or the "equal treatment probabilities" for females. We computed these probabilities by multiplying the means of the females' variables by the parameter estimates from the males' equations. We used these products to predict the equal treatment probabilities for females. Finally, we took the ratio of the two sets of probabilities—"equal treatment" to "predicted," or p(2) to p(1)—to estimate the gender-bias quotient. As the gender-bias quotients approach 1, the amount of gender bias diminishes. Gender-bias quotients greater than 1 indicate that females were less likely to receive a particular outcome than if their characteristics were treated as males' characteristics. Gender-bias quotients less than 1 indicates the reverse, that females were more likely to receive an outcome than if their characteristics were treated equally to males' characteristics. For example, a hypothetical outcome of .7 detentions in a state would suggest that females were more likely to be detained in that state than males with similar characteristics; an outcome of 1.3, on the other hand, would indicate that females were less likely to be detained than males with similar characteristics.

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## Model Specification

The general form of our logistic regressions was as follows. If we denote any one of the dichotomous dependent variables, for example, detention by D, then the probability of detention, conditioned on a vector of case characteristics X and a vector of effects B, is given by

$$P(1) (D=1 | \mathbf{XB}) = [1 + \exp(-B_0 - \sum B_i X_i)]^{-1}$$

The case characteristics included in the models included variables that measured offense history, current offense, etc., as described before. The entire set of variables used in building the models is reviewed below.

Because we estimated separate models for females and males, the parameters indicate the gender-specific treatments of each gender's characteristics by the courts.

To estimate the separate logistic regressions, we used maximum likelihood techniques and obtained the estimated effects for females and males. From these, and the mean values of the independent variables, we calculated the estimated probabilities. Continuing with the example, we calculated  $p(1)$  as the probability of detention for females. We then calculated a second probability of detention, the equal treatment probability, or  $p(2)$ :

$$p(2) = [1 + \exp(-B_0^m - \sum B_i^m X_i^f)]^{-1}$$

Here the Bs represent the estimated parameters from the males' equations, and the Xs are the means of the independent variables for females.

Finally, the ratio of  $p(2)$  to  $p(1)$  yielded our measure of gender-bias. A ratio of 1 indicates no gender bias. The ratio of 1 also is equivalent to a test of no net differences in the entire set of coefficients between the females' and males' equations. A gender-bias quotient greater than 1 indicates females are less likely to have the outcome of interest than are similarly situated males; conversely a gender-bias quotient less than 1 indicates that females are more likely to have the outcome of interest than similarly situated males.

There is no absolute standard for determining how much of a deviation from 1 in the gender-bias quotients constitutes gender bias. We determined that deviations greater than plus or minus .2 provided indications of gender bias. This figure was derived from criminological research on racial discrimination in which conclusions that discrimination was not widespread were on the basis of unexplained differences of up to 20 percent in the outcomes between black and whites.

The parameter estimates of the effects of independent variables represent the change in the log of the odds of a dependent variable. For the purposes of analyzing the magnitude of effects of independent variables, the change in the log of the odds (or log odds) as a result of a unit change in an independent variable is difficult to interpret. However, by exponentiating

the parameter estimates, odds ratios can be calculated. The odds ratios can be interpreted in a relatively straightforward manner. The odds ratio is an estimate of how much more likely, or unlikely, it is for the outcome of interest to be present among those having a particular characteristic than those not having that characteristic. For example, an odds ratio of 4 for a variable indicating whether a status offender had prior dispositions would be interpreted to indicate that status offenders with prior dispositions are four times as likely as those without prior dispositions to have the outcome (e.g., detention) of interest.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, the method we used to estimate gender bias was based on methods developed by economists to measure discrimination in labor markets. Their method, called the "residual difference," measures discrimination, or bias, in terms of the differences between the two sets of outcomes after the effects of all relevant variables have been accounted for. In the residual difference method, a bias or discrimination is the residual that cannot be explained by the variables in the model. The strength of the method lies in its ability to account for bias in terms of the differences in treatments on characteristics. The major weakness of the method lies in using an incomplete or incorrect set of variables to estimate the regressions. Depending on how they are correlated with the outcome variables, omitted variables or incorrectly included variables could reduce or increase the "residual difference." Thus, misspecified models could lead to incorrect inferences about bias.

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## Variables Used in the Models

We fit state-specific models for each decision, using the relevant variables available in the states' data sets. We used our knowledge of each state's system to supplement our model-building. In general, we used five common categories or classes of independent variables to build our models. These categories included (1) variables to measure the current offense, prior offense history, and juvenile justice system contact, such as source of referral for the current offense, detention prior to adjudication, and personal attributes, such as age and race, and (2) variables to measure the location and geographic characteristics of the court.

We defined our four dependent variables as follows:

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<sup>9</sup>We used the odds ratios to conduct our analysis of gender differences in the effects of variables. These results are discussed in the final section of this appendix.

- Intake decision: A dichotomous variable to indicate whether a status offense case referred to a juvenile court's intake office was petitioned to the court for formal processing.
- Detention: A dichotomous variable to indicate whether a petitioned status offender was detained securely before adjudication.
- Adjudication: A dichotomous variable to indicate the outcome of an adjudicatory hearing, specifically, that a case was adjudicated as a status offender.
- Placement: A dichotomous variable to indicate whether an adjudicated status offender was given an out-of-home placement.

The specific variables that fell within the categories of our independent variables were as follows:

- Current offense: We used a set of indicator (dichotomous or dummy) variables to indicate whether the current offense, i.e., the referral offense, was for running away, truancy, ungovernability, liquor-law violations, or other status offenses.
- Prior offense history: We used a number of measures of prior offense history, including the number of prior juvenile court referrals for any offense over the life of the juvenile, the number of prior status-offense dispositions during the 2 years before the current referral, the number of prior delinquency offense dispositions during the 2 years prior to the current referral, and the number of prior delinquency adjudications over the life of the juvenile. Not all measures were available for each state.
- Source of referral: We used a set of dummy variables to indicate the source of referral. The variables for sources of referral included the law-enforcement agency, school, family, and other sources. We varied the reference category by state.
- Age at referral: We used the age of the status offender at the time that the case was referred.<sup>10</sup>
- Race of the offender: We used two dummy variables to indicate whether a status offender (1) was black or (2) belonged to another race or ethnic group.
- Metropolitan status of the court of venue: Except in California,<sup>11</sup> we measured the metropolitan status of the court by a dummy variable to indicate whether a court was located in a county belonging to a metropolitan statistical area or a primary metropolitan statistical area. We

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<sup>10</sup>The California data did not include age at referral; however, the data did include age at disposition, which we used as a proxy for age at referral.

<sup>11</sup>All of the counties in California were metropolitan. To measure variability across counties in California, we used dummy variables to indicate cases disposed in each county.

also measured the population density per square mile of the county containing the court.

- Detention status: For the adjudication and placement decisions, we used a dummy variable to indicate whether a case was detained securely.

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## Model Fitting Procedures

We fit the models to the data on a state-by-state and outcome-by-outcome basis. We developed models containing a set of independent variables that fit the data better than other combinations of independent variables in a state's data set. Across states, our models did not necessarily contain the same subset of variables. As a result, we were not able to directly compare the size of the effects of different variables across states; although we did attempt to identify which variables in each state's models had the biggest effects and to make general comparisons about the effects of variables.

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## Sample Selection Criteria for Each Outcome

For the petitioned at the intake decision, we used the sample of all status-offender cases referred to the intake office in a state. We did not estimate a model of the intake decision for Nebraska because data on cases handled informally were not reported for the state's two largest counties. For the detention and adjudication outcomes, we used the sample of all cases handled formally or petitioned to the juvenile court. We did not estimate a detention model for Utah because its data set did not contain measures of detention. For the detention and adjudication outcomes, we also measured the current status offense as the referral offense. In estimating the placement outcomes, we restricted our analysis to those status-offense cases adjudicated as status offenses. For the placement outcomes, we measured the offense as the disposed offense. We did not estimate placement models for status offenders in Arizona because there were too few cases.

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## Analysis of Gender Bias

Our findings on gender bias are summarized on table III.4. A discussion of our results pertaining to the analysis of the differences in the effects of individual parameters and of offsetting effects follows the discussion of the gender-bias quotients.

Table III.4 shows, by gender for each state, three results for each of the dependent variables: (1) the "models probability" of having been petitioned at intake, detained securely before adjudication, adjudicated as a status offender, and placed out-of-home, or p(1), for females and males; (2) the "equal treatment probability" of the same outcomes for females, or

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p(2); and (3) the gender-bias quotient, or ratio of probabilities for females if treated like males, to females as predicted by the model—i.e., p(2) to p(1).

**Appendix III  
Technical Discussion of Gender-Bias Models**

**Table III.4: Summary of Estimated Probabilities and Gender-Bias Quotients**

State		Intake		Detention		Adjudication		Placement	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Arizona	Model probability <sup>a</sup>	0.0180	0.0392	0.0189	0.0023	0.4351	0.4315	NA <sup>d</sup>	NA <sup>d</sup>
	Equal treatment probability <sup>b</sup>		0.0452		0.0077		0.4287		NA <sup>d</sup>
	Gender-bias quotient <sup>c</sup>		1.15		3.39		0.99		NA <sup>d</sup>
California	Model probability <sup>a</sup>	0.0740	0.0765	0.0618	0.0158	0.6716	0.6848	0.5007	0.3274
	Equal treatment probability <sup>b</sup>		0.0719		0.0162		0.6397		0.3504
	Gender-bias quotient <sup>c</sup>		0.94		1.02		0.93		1.07
Florida	Model probability <sup>a</sup>	0.1348	0.0837	0.0464	0.0310	0.2623	0.2008	0.1395	0.0348
	Equal treatment probability <sup>b</sup>		0.0652		0.0415		0.2445		0.1033
	Gender-bias quotient <sup>c</sup>		0.78		1.34		1.22		2.97
Missouri	Model probability <sup>a</sup>	0.1008	0.1018	0.1118	0.1074	0.8287	0.8144	0.3225	0.3606
	Equal treatment probability <sup>b</sup>		0.0977		0.1052		0.8298		0.3076
	Gender-bias quotient <sup>c</sup>		0.96		0.98		1.02		0.85
Nebraska	Model probability <sup>a</sup>	NA <sup>d</sup>	NA <sup>d</sup>	0.0529	0.0351	0.9226	0.9113	0.0707	0.0903
	Equal treatment probability <sup>b</sup>		NA <sup>d</sup>		0.0507		0.9257		0.0719
	Gender-bias quotient <sup>c</sup>		NA <sup>d</sup>		1.44		1.02		0.80
South Carolina	Model probability <sup>a</sup>	0.4070	0.3577	0.0099	0.0094	0.9381	0.9248	0.0093	0.0126
	Equal treatment probability <sup>b</sup>		0.3786		0.0097		0.9324		0.0101
	Gender-bias quotient <sup>c</sup>		1.06		1.03		1.01		0.80
Utah	Model probability <sup>a</sup>	0.2782	0.2399	NA <sup>c</sup>	NA <sup>c</sup>	0.8316	0.8263	0.0207	0.0155
	Equal treatment probability <sup>b</sup>		0.2363		NA <sup>c</sup>		0.8289		0.0129
	Gender-bias quotient <sup>c</sup>		0.98		NA <sup>c</sup>		1.00		0.83

<sup>a</sup>The model probability is the aggregate probability for females and males as predicted by the gender-specific regressions when females' and males' characteristics were evaluated at their mean levels.

<sup>b</sup>As defined in the text, the equal treatment probability, for females, is the probability of an outcome if females' characteristics were treated equal to males' characteristics. As in the case of the model probability, females' characteristics were evaluated at their mean levels.

<sup>c</sup>The gender-bias quotient is the ratio of females if treated like males' probability to the females' predicted probability.

<sup>d</sup>Data were not available.

Source: GAO analysis of NCJJ state data.



## Overview of Findings on Gender Bias

In analyzing the gender-bias quotients, we were interested in whether the aggregate outcomes for females differed from what they would have been if their characteristics were treated equally to males. If there were differences, as indicated by gender-bias quotients that deviated from 1, then we wanted to determine which variables in the models explained the differences, as previously discussed. Of secondary concern were those cases in which the gender-bias quotients were not different from 1, but there were differences in the treatment of specific characteristics between females and males.

In most of the outcomes we analyzed across the seven states, there was little evidence of widespread gender bias. In other words, for most of the outcomes, the gender-bias quotients were near 1. This was the case in five of the six petitioned-at-intake decision models, four of the six detention models, six of the seven adjudication models, and five of the six placement models. In other words, across a diverse set of states, which represented different types of juvenile justice systems, females and males tended to receive similar treatment.

The exceptions to this general finding occurred in the following decision points: (1) in petitioning-at-intake decisions, females in Florida were estimated to be more likely to be petitioned to juvenile court than if they were treated equal to males; (2) in detention decisions, females in Arizona,<sup>12</sup> Florida, and Nebraska were estimated to be less likely to be detained than males; (3) in the adjudication decision, females in Florida were estimated to be less likely to be adjudicated than males in that state; and (4) in the placement decisions, females in Florida were estimated to be less likely to be placed than males in Florida.

In addition, while only Florida's placement outcome deviated by more than .2 from a gender-bias quotient of 1, in two other states, Nebraska and South Carolina, the gender-bias quotients for the placement decisions were .80. In addition, in two other states, Missouri and Utah, the gender bias quotients were less than 1 and near .8. Overall, in four of the six states where placement data were available, the gender-bias quotients for the placement decisions were less than 1. While only the result for Florida was consistent with our definition of gender bias, in these other four states, there appeared to be a slightly higher likelihood for placing females out-of-home as compared to similarity situated males, but the magnitude

<sup>12</sup>In Arizona, while the gender-bias quotient was relatively large, 3.39, the estimated model probabilities and the estimated equal treatment probabilities were very small in magnitude. The model probability was .0023, and the equal treatment probability was .0077. In other words, the difference in treatment between females and males was comparatively small.

of the effect in any of these four states was not large enough to lead us to conclude that there was significant gender bias.

The odds ratios from the parameters of the regression models provided some insight into the reasons for gender bias in the cases identified above. In the petitioning decisions in Florida in which females were more likely to be petitioned to juvenile court than in their equal-treatment outcomes, the gender differences in treatment arose around female runaways and in the location of the juvenile courts. Female runaways were more likely to be petitioned to court than male runaways; however, female runaways were less likely to be petitioned than female truants or liquor-law violators. In addition, female runaways comprised a larger portion of female cases than male runaways did of male cases. Females in metropolitan areas were about a third more likely to be petitioned than their male counterparts. Thus, the higher aggregate likelihood of females to be petitioned to juvenile court appeared to be due largely to differences in treatment of female runaways, who also happened to comprise a larger share of all female status offenders.

In the detention decisions in which females were less likely to be detained than if they were treated like males, the gender differences appeared to arise from two different sources: the source of referral and the type of status offense (in the Arizona case), a variety of variables (in the Florida case), and the type of status offenders petitioned to the court (in the Nebraska case). In Arizona, petitioned females who were referred to the court by law-enforcement officers were one-tenth as likely to be detained than their male counterparts. In addition, male status offenders referred by law-enforcement officers comprised a larger proportion of the sample of all male status-offender cases than occurred among all female status-offender cases. Finally, female runaways were more likely to be detained than male runaways.

In Florida's detention outcomes, gender differences in treatment of characteristics occurred in a number of variables. Female runaways and liquor-law violators were less likely to be detained than males referred to juvenile court for these offenses, and females processed in metropolitan areas also were less likely to be detained than males.

In Nebraska's detention outcomes, the gender bias arose because of gender differences in the treatment of particular types of status offenders. In particular, females picked up for truancy, liquor, and other offenses were estimated to be less than half as likely to be detained than male

truants. On the basis of their other characteristics, females and males were treated about equally.

In Florida's adjudication decision in which females were less likely to be adjudicated than their equal-treatment outcomes, the type of status offense was related to the gender bias. Specifically, female runaways were about three times less likely to be adjudicated than were male runaways, and females petitioned for liquor offenses were about one-fifth as likely to be adjudicated as males petitioned for liquor offenses.

Finally, in Florida's placement outcome, which had the gender-bias quotient that deviated the farthest from 1, and in which females were less likely to be placed than their equal-treatment outcomes, the type of status offense also seemed to be associated with the gender bias. Specifically, females adjudicated for liquor offenses, truancy, or ungovernability all were less likely to be placed than comparable males with these offenses. In addition, females adjudicated for liquor violations, truancy, and ungovernability were less likely to be placed than females adjudicated for running away. Finally, females' prior offense histories were not treated as severely as males, that is, females with prior offenses were not as likely to be placed as males with prior offenses.

The lower likelihood of placement for females in Florida does not necessarily mean that females were better off or that males were treated more harshly than females. To determine this, it would be necessary to determine the range of treatment options associated with various placements. For example, a concern expressed in our site visits related to the treatment options available or unavailable when status offenders were placed out-of-home. Placements may be used for a variety of purposes, including providing services and protecting females from becoming victims of abuse. This latter concern may be reflected by the fact that in Florida female runaways were more likely to be placed than other types of female status offenders.

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## Effects of Specific Variables on the Petitioned at Intake, Detention, Adjudication, and Placement Outcomes

In addition to using the results of the regressions to explain the occurrences of gender bias, we analyzed the regressions to identify the variables that were associated with each of the outcomes. Although differences in the way variables were measured and in the way states processed status offenders prevented us from making direct comparisons between the states on each set of models, we did assess the magnitude of the effects of the variables to identify similarities and differences.

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### Variables Affecting the Petitioned at Intake Decision

Across the six states where intake data were available, no single variable had consistent effects on the decision to petition status offenders at intake, although prior contact with juvenile court generally increased the likelihood that a case would be detained. In four of the six states, the type of status offense for which females and males were referred to the courts did have a strong association with the likelihood that the cases were petitioned to the juvenile courts. Specifically, in California, Florida, and Utah, liquor-law violators and truants were estimated to be more likely, whether they were female or male, to be petitioned to the courts than other types of status offenders. In Arizona, this was true only for truants; moreover, black males were more likely to be petitioned to court than black females. In California and Missouri, blacks of either gender were more likely to be petitioned than persons of other races. Finally, in Arizona, California, Missouri, and South Carolina, the source of referral influenced the likelihood that a case was estimated to be petitioned at intake. In particular, in South Carolina, cases referred to intake by family members were estimated to be more likely to be petitioned for both females and males than were cases referred to intake by other sources.

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### Variables Affecting Detention Outcomes

No variables had consistent effects across all seven states. However, when the measures of prior offense history—whether measured as prior referrals, adjudications, or delinquencies—were available in a states' data set, the prior offense history tended to be positively associated with the likelihood of detention for both females and males. The only exception occurred in the effect of prior status-offense dispositions on the Arizona detention probabilities. For males in this case, the number of prior status-offense dispositions during the 2 years before the current offense decreased the probability of detention.

Other variables that had large positive effects on the probability of detention included the source of referral and the particular types of status

offenses. Specifically, cases referred by law-enforcement agencies were estimated to be more likely to be detained for both females and males in Arizona, California, and Nebraska. In Arizona and California, the gender more likely to be detained given that a case was referred by law-enforcement officials differed. In Arizona, males referred by the police were about 14 times more likely to be detained than females referred by the police. In California, females referred by the police were about 9 times more likely to be detained than males referred by the police. In South Carolina, females referred to the court by family members or by schools were estimated to be more likely to be detained than males referred by those sources, and females referred by family members and schools were more likely to be detained than females referred by other sources.

Female runaways were estimated to be more likely to be detained than other types of status offenders in Arizona, Florida, and Nebraska. On the other hand, in Florida, male runaways were more likely to be detained than were female runaways.

Demographic variables, such as age and race, did not exhibit consistent effects on detention outcomes across states. However, in three states, race was associated with the likelihood of detention, and the effects of race varied with gender. Specifically, in Arizona, black females were more likely to be detained than black males; conversely, in Florida and California, black males were more likely to be detained than black females. In Nebraska, blacks—female or male—were more likely than whites to be detained.

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## Variables Affecting Adjudication Outcomes

Adjudication outcomes for females and males tended to be affected most by three variables: detention, source of referral, and type of status offense. In general, detention before adjudication lowered the estimated probability of adjudication. The estimated direction of the effects of law-enforcement agencies as a source of referral tended to change between the detention and adjudication decisions. Law-enforcement referrals were estimated as more likely to be detained but less likely to result in cases' being adjudicated as status offenders. Further, this change in the direction of effects between detention and adjudication also occurred for status offenders who were referred for running away. Runaways, in general, were estimated as less likely to be adjudicated than liquor-law violators; this was despite the fact that runaways were estimated to be more likely to be detained than liquor-law violators.

These opposing effects between the two stages of the process may indicate that the juvenile courts use detention and adjudication in different ways. It is possible that detention may be viewed as analogous to a disposition for status offenders. The court may view detention as a sufficient treatment, given that a youth was warned or counseled about his behavior, and the court may not view additional sanctions as necessary. The effects of running away may also be explained in this manner. Runaways may be more likely to be detained to give officials time to contact the family and return the juvenile. These cases then may be less likely to be adjudicated because the juveniles would have been returned to their families.

Other variables included in the models did not exhibit similar general trends across the states. For example, a prior offense history increased the probability of adjudication in three states, and metropolitan status decreased the probability of adjudication in three states. The effects of age and race were not consistent for females and males. These other variables may not have had a statistically significant effect on the adjudication outcome, or they may have had a statistically significant effect for females or males but not both, or the direction of the effects may have varied across states. In addition, the size of the effects of these variables was small, raising doubts about their overall impact on adjudication outcomes. The variations in the patterns for these variables attest to the differences in the states' processes.

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## Variables Affecting Placement Outcomes

With the exception of a prior offense history and the type of offense, the relationships between the independent variables and the placement outcomes were similarly difficult to characterize between the female and male equations and across the six states' models. A prior offense history for example, was positively associated with the likelihood of placement for both females and males in four of the six states where placement data were available, while in a fifth state, a prior offense history was positively related to placement for males but not statistically significant for females.

Other variables, such as the source of referral and type of status offense, were associated with the likelihood of placement, but the particular source of referral and type of offense that affected placement varied across states. For example, in Missouri, cases referred to the court by the law-enforcement agencies and schools were less likely to be placed regardless of their gender than cases referred by other sources. However, in Nebraska, males referred by family members were less likely to be

placed than males referred by other sources, while females referred by family members were more likely to be placed than females referred by other sources. Alternatively, in South Carolina, males whose cases were referred by schools and family members were more likely to be placed, while females whose cases were referred by these sources were less likely to be placed than females referred by other sources.

The placement outcomes for runaways were similar to those of the adjudication of runaways. In the states in which the type of status offense was associated with placement, runaways were less likely to be placed than other types of status offenses. Otherwise, the status offenses more or less likely to be associated with placement outcomes varied across the states.

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## State-Specific Results

Finally, when the case processing outcomes within states were analyzed, there were a few variables that had consistent effects across outcomes within states. For example, in South Carolina, the source of referral influenced each outcome—particularly when the source was school or family. Cases referred by family members, regardless of gender, were more likely to be petitioned to court than cases referred by other sources. At the detention stage, the effects of source of referral varied with gender. Males referred by schools and family were less likely than females referred by these sources to be detained. Conversely, at the placement stage, males referred by schools and family were more likely to be placed than females referred by these sources.

Second, in some states, the type of status offense influenced the outcomes, but the effects differed. For example, in California, truants—regardless of gender—were more likely to be petitioned at intake than liquor-law violators or runaways. However, at the adjudication and placement stages, male runaways were less likely to be adjudicated or placed than female runaways; but both female and male truants were about equally less likely to be adjudicated or placed than other types of status offenders.

In general, the effects of specific variables differed across states and stages of processing. These differences may be due to differences among the states in the structure or objectives of juvenile courts.

# Overview of Services for Female and Male Status Offenders in Selected Facilities

Generally, we found no significant gender-based differences in the counseling, educational, and medical services provided to females and males at the 15 facilities we visited, although the extent of such services varied by type of facility. However, a majority of the juvenile justice officials and all of the service providers in the counties we visited said that more facilities and services were needed for status offenders, both females and males.

## Background Information on Facilities Visited

Table IV.1 presents background data about each of the 15 facilities we visited—4 secure detention centers, 6 shelters, 4 group homes, and 1 nonresidential program. We did not make any comparisons or evaluations regarding the quality of services for these facilities.



**Appendix IV**  
**Overview of Services for Female and Male**  
**Status Offenders in Selected Facilities**

**Table IV.1: GAO Visits to Selected Facilities in Four States (by Urban and Rural Counties) With Services for Status Offenders**

State and county (urban or rural)	Facility	Facility type
<b>Florida</b>		
Duval County (urban)	Practical and Cultural Education Center for Girls	Nonresidential, nonsecure
	Regional Juvenile Detention Center	Detention facility, residential, secure
	Youth Crisis Center South	Shelter, residential, nonsecure
Alachua County (rural)	Interface Runaway Shelter	Shelter, residential, nonsecure
<b>Kentucky</b>		
Fayette County (urban)	Coleman House	Shelter, residential, nonsecure
	Juvenile Detention Center	Detention facility, residential, secure
	Project Respect Group Home for Girls <sup>a</sup>	Group home, residential, nonsecure
Jefferson County (urban)	Bardstown Group Home for Boys <sup>a</sup>	Group home, residential, nonsecure

**Appendix IV  
Overview of Services for Female and Male  
Status Offenders in Selected Facilities**

<b>Juveniles served</b>				
<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Offender type</b>	<b>Capacity</b>	<b>Purpose of facility</b>
14-17	Female	Status offenders and delinquents	60 students	To provide an alternative to incarceration or institutionalization for troubled girls by offering them academics, independent life skills training, counseling, and goal setting. (The Center also accepted dependent, pregnant, or parenting girls.)
12-18	Female and male	Status offenders and delinquents	113 beds	To provide for the safety, care, and custody of juveniles from the time they are detained until their cases are processed through the juvenile court. (According to facility officials, under Florida law, status offenders who are the subject of a judicial order requiring detention can be placed in a juvenile detention center.)
10-17	Female and male	Status offenders	20 beds	To provide shelter and counseling to runaway and homeless youth.
10-17	Female and male	Status offenders	16 beds	To provide temporary shelter and counseling to runaways to help them and their families resolve their conflicts.
0-17	Female and male	Status offenders and delinquents	16 beds	To provide a temporary, out-of-home placement alternative for children when secure detention is not appropriate. (The Coleman House also provided services to dependent, abused, and neglected children.)
7-17	Female and male	Status offenders and delinquents	25 beds	To provide for the care and custody of youth pending their release by the juvenile court. (According to facility officials, under Kentucky law, status offenders who violate a court order can be placed in a secure juvenile detention or holding facility.)
13-17	Female	Status offenders and delinquents	8 beds	To provide court-ordered residential placement, which includes counseling and educational services, and promote a positive change in the girls' negative behaviors. (Ungovernable behavior was the most common status offense referral.)
15-17	Male	Status offenders and delinquents	8 beds	To provide court-ordered residential placement, which includes counseling and educational services, and promote a positive change in the boys' negative behaviors. (Truancy was the most common status offense referral.)

(continued)

**Appendix IV**  
**Overview of Services for Female and Male**  
**Status Offenders in Selected Facilities**

<b>State and county (urban or rural)</b>	<b>Facility</b>	<b>Facility type</b>
Johnson County (rural)	Big Sandy Regional Detention Center	Detention facility, residential, secure
<b>Maryland</b>		
Prince Georges County (urban)	Second Mile Runaway Home	Shelter, residential, nonsecure
St. Mary's County (rural)	Walden Sierra, Inc.	Shelter, residential, nonsecure
<b>Texas</b>		
Bexar County (urban)	Juvenile Detention Center	Detention facility, residential, secure
	Salvation Army Adolescent Treatment Program	Group home, residential, nonsecure
	San Antonio Youth Residential for Females <sup>b</sup>	Group home, residential, nonsecure
Dallas County (urban)	Letot Center's Emergency Shelter	Shelter, residential, nonsecure

**Appendix IV  
Overview of Services for Female and Male  
Status Offenders in Selected Facilities**

Juveniles served				
Age	Gender	Offender type	Capacity	Purpose of facility
12-17	Female and male	Status offenders and delinquents	10 beds	To provide for the care and custody of youths pending their release by the juvenile court. (According to facility officials, under Kentucky law, status offenders who violate a court order can be placed in a secure juvenile detention or holding facility.)
12-17	Female and male	Status offenders and delinquents	7 beds	To provide short-term residential shelter, including assessment, counseling, and educational services, for runaway, homeless, or abused youth.
12-17	Female and male	Status offenders	6 beds	To provide a protective, temporary living arrangement and counseling to runaways to help them resolve the problems in their homes.
10-17	Female and male	Status offenders and delinquents	96 beds	To provide a secure, temporary facility for juveniles waiting to appear in court or until placements can be arranged.
13-17	Female	Status offenders and delinquents	16 beds	To provide specialized clinical services, including individual and group counseling, for females. (The Program also provided services to dependent females.)
13-17	Female	Status offenders	8 beds	To provide substance abuse treatment and rehabilitation services to medically indigent youth.
10-16	Female and male	Status offenders	24 beds	To divert status offenders from juvenile detention, reunite them with their families whenever possible, and prevent them from committing more serious offenses and progressing further into the juvenile justice system.

<sup>a</sup>The Volunteers of America of Kentucky, Inc., operates both the Bardstown Group Home for Boys in Jefferson County, KY, and the Project Respect Group Home for Girls in Fayette County, KY.

<sup>b</sup>The Mexican American Unity Council, Inc., operates the San Antonio Youth Residential for Females in Bexar County, TX. The Council also operates a similar male-only group home, the Youth Male Residential Treatment Facility, that has 14 beds in Bexar County.

Source: Developed by GAO from information provided by facility officials.

The four secure detention centers held females and males for short terms in physically restrictive environments pending juvenile court action. Staff at the four detention facilities told us that the majority of the youth held

were males. In addition, the detention officials reported that most females and males detained at the detention facilities were delinquent offenders, not status offenders.<sup>1</sup> Staff at three of the four detention facilities reported having problems with overcrowding caused by too many referrals of female and male youth.<sup>2</sup> For status offenders held over 24 hours, the detention facilities' staff reported that the average length of stay ranged from 7 days to 30 days.

Also in the four secure detention facilities, female and male status offenders could be placed in the same living areas with the more serious offenders. These serious offenders included delinquents who may have committed homicide, sexual assault, robbery, or aggravated assault.<sup>3</sup> Staff told us the youth placed in the facilities were separated primarily by gender because the detention facilities were generally overcrowded or had limited bed space. After gender, one detention facility considered the youths' physical sizes and ages in making placement decisions within the female-only and the male-only living areas. For example, the younger, smaller males were not placed in the same living area with the older, larger males. Staff at another detention center told us, however, that they had no flexibility beyond gender in placing females because the facility had only one living area for females, whereas there were six living areas for males.<sup>4</sup> Staff said that since most of the referrals received at the facility were delinquent males, only one living area was set aside for females.

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<sup>1</sup>The secure facilities we visited in Duval County (Florida) and in Fayette and Johnson Counties (Kentucky) detained only those status offenders who had been ordered into detention by the juvenile courts for violating a valid court order. The Bexar County Detention Center (Texas) detained all female and male youth referred to the facility. Bexar County detention facility officials reported, however, that few status offenders were detained over 24 hours. At the time of our March 1994 visits, 7 percent of the female and male youth at the Duval Detention Center (Florida) were status offenders, and 40 percent of the female and male youth at the Big Sandy Regional Detention Center (Kentucky) were status offenders. None of the youth at the Fayette County Detention Center (Kentucky) was a status offender. Bexar County officials were unable to estimate the number of status offenders at the facility.

<sup>2</sup>An official at the Big Sandy Regional Detention Center (Kentucky) said the Center did not have a problem with overcrowding because the facility's 10 beds were enough to meet the demands of the rural area.

<sup>3</sup>To preclude such commingling of status and delinquent offenders, in 1979 Dallas County, TX, established an alternative placement facility, the Letot Center, which housed only status offenders (both females and males). Before 1979, status offenders in Dallas County were taken by law-enforcement officers to the local juvenile detention center, which primarily served delinquent offenders. At the time of our review, law-enforcement officers took all status offenders to the Letot Center where their cases were processed and family members were contacted. The Letot Center counselors, the status offenders, and the offenders' family members all have input in determining if shelter care and/or nonresidential counseling is needed. (Tables IV.1 and IV.2 provide additional background information on the Letot Center and its services.)

<sup>4</sup>Each of the 7 living areas, or modules, had 12 single-occupancy rooms.

Of the 11 nonsecure facilities, the 6 shelters provided short-term care to females and males. Staff at the six shelters told us the majority of youth served were status offenders. At five of the six shelters, staff reported serving more females than males. Staff at the remaining shelter reported serving, on average, an equal number of female and male youth. Staff at two shelters also said that the shelters sometimes experienced overcrowding caused by too many female and male referrals, especially during the months that the local schools were in session. According to staff at the six shelters, the reported average lengths of stay for female and male status offenders ranged from 4 days to 45 days.

Gender was the primary factor in determining living arrangements at the six co-educational shelters. Female and male status offenders were not commingled with serious juvenile offenders because the shelters served only status offenders, less serious delinquent offenders, and dependents.<sup>5</sup>

Of the other five nonsecure facilities, the four group homes provided long-term care with access to community resources and programs. Three of the four group homes served only females, and one served only males. Staff at the two group homes in Texas told us the majority of the females served were status offenders and/or dependents. The staff at the male-only group home and the female-only group home in Kentucky said the facilities served more delinquent offenders than status offenders. The staff at the four group homes also said their facilities were not overcrowded because youth were not accepted unless a bed was available. According to these staff, the average length of stay for female and male status offenders ranged from 182 days (about 6 months) to 274 days (about 9 months).

The one nonsecure, nonresidential program for status offenders that we visited was the Practical and Cultural Education Center for Girls, located in Jacksonville, FL.<sup>6</sup> The Center's program, which has been nationally recognized,<sup>7</sup> was not overcrowded because a female student was accepted only if classroom space was available. A waiting list was maintained to place females as space became available. According to officials of this

<sup>5</sup>Dependents are youth who have been placed under the care and custody of the state because they have been abused, neglected, or abandoned by their parents or guardians.

<sup>6</sup>The Center at Jacksonville could serve 60 students. Additional Center nonresidential programs are located in four other cities in Florida—Bradenton, Fort Lauderdale, Miami, and Orlando.

<sup>7</sup>For example, OJJDP has recognized the successes of the programs. See "P.A.C.E. Center for Girls: The Florida Program Which for the Past Eight Years Has Successfully Given Troubled Females a Second Chance," Profile, 1991, (Vol. 5, No. 5). Profile is published by Community Research Associates (Champagne, IL), which is under contract with OJJDP.

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program, the average length of attendance for females in the program was 243 days (about 8 months).

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## Gender-Specific Information About Counseling, Educational, and Medical Services at Facilities Visited

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At each of the 15 facilities visited, we obtained gender-specific information about counseling, educational, and medical services, that is, the services most relevant to the principal needs of status offenders. The results of our visits are summarized below and in table IV.2.

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### Counseling Services

Female and male status offenders did not routinely receive individual or group counseling at the four secure detention facilities. These facilities, however, could obtain counseling services from community resources if staff or resident youth (including female and male status offenders) requested such services.<sup>8</sup> Juvenile court judges could also order the facilities to provide counseling. For example, professional staff at Florida's Duval County Juvenile Detention Center told us that juvenile court judges sometimes ordered the detention center to undertake social assessments and provide counseling services to female and male status offenders placed in the facility. The detention center officials said that status offenders were transported to community health-care providers to receive these services.

All six shelters, the four group homes, and the nonresidential program provided a variety of on-site counseling services to individuals, groups, or both. Female and male status offenders, however, were provided the same types and amounts of counseling within the co-educational facilities in which they were placed, according to officials at the facilities. Counseling topics could cover physical and sexual abuse, as well as substance abuse issues. Individual counseling ranged from 2 hours to 6 hours per week at the shelters, 1 hour to 4 hours per week at the group homes, and 5 hours per week at the nonresidential program. Group counseling ranged from 4 hours to 14 hours per week at the shelters,<sup>9</sup> 3 hours to 5 hours per week at the group homes, and 1 hour per week at the nonresidential program. All

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<sup>8</sup>One secure detention facility had a counselor on staff. The counselor did not provide individual or group counseling to the youth on a regular or scheduled basis but did respond to requests for counseling services.

<sup>9</sup>One of the six shelters and one of the four group homes did not provide formal group counseling.

of these facilities had arrangements with community health-care providers to supply additional counseling when needed.

Some facility staff told us that female and male status offenders needed family counseling, but such service was difficult to maintain or provide. For example, two of the shelters offer family counseling, but the programs reportedly were poorly attended. Staff from two of the group homes said that they could not offer family counseling because court-ordered placements resulted in youth coming from all areas of the state. These officials explained that family counseling was impractical because the parents would have been unable to attend the sessions since they did not live close to the respective facility.

Nineteen of the 34 juvenile justice officials and 6 of the 15 service providers we interviewed emphasized that family counseling is essential because female and male status offenders were running from some form of abuse or neglect at home. According to these officials, family counseling could help correct poor parenting skills, which is a contributor to abuse and neglect. Staff at one of the group homes we visited told us that limited resources were used most effectively only when the whole family was included in the treatment plan. According to the staff, a group-home facility could build a youth's self-esteem and correct negative behaviors, but frequently the youth may be released from the group home and returned to the environment that caused the negative behaviors. The staff said that in these situations, where the family issues had not been addressed, the youth was likely to revert to negative behaviors.

Staff at other facilities told us that parents and guardians did not always give female and male status offenders the support needed to address and solve problems. For example, an official at one shelter said they were unable to return a pregnant runaway to her home because her single-parent mother was using drugs and had just been evicted from their apartment.

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## Educational Services

The 15 facilities we visited provided a variety of educational services. At three of the four secure detention facilities, status offenders generally attend on-site schools staffed by licensed teachers.<sup>10</sup> The other secure facility, Kentucky's Big Sandy Regional Detention Center, did not have an on-site school. A representative from the detention center told us resident

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<sup>10</sup>In addition to an on-site school, the Fayette County Juvenile Detention Center (Kentucky) had a school-release program that allowed some female and male youth to attend local schools during the day. A juvenile court judge must approve each youth's participation in the school-release program.



youth are provided educational services when the juvenile court judges order the public schools to transport the youth to their classes.<sup>11</sup>

At the six (co-educational) shelters, we found no differences in the educational services provided to female and male status offenders. Status offenders at four of the six shelters either attended the local public schools or received daily or part-time instruction at the respective facility. These youth generally did not attend the local schools if they had dropped out of school, were studying for their general equivalency diploma, or did not reside in the county where the shelter was located. At the fifth shelter, all female and male status offenders attended an on-site school staffed by licensed teachers.<sup>12</sup> At the sixth shelter, all female and male status offenders attended local schools.

Female and male status offenders also received similar educational services at the four gender-specific group homes. For example, we visited one male-only group home and one female-only group home in Kentucky that were operated by the same organization. Both of these group homes sent the youth to county alternative schools.<sup>13</sup> The two remaining group homes (each serving females only) sent resident youth to the local public schools.<sup>14</sup>

Education was a main component of the services offered status offenders at the nonresidential program we visited in Florida. Licensed teachers provided basic instruction, which enabled the youth to earn high-school credits that would aid them in returning to the public schools or obtaining a general equivalency diploma. Classes were conducted on the campus of the local community college, which gave the youth access to other educational services as well.

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<sup>11</sup>At the time of our visit in March 1994, none of the three females and seven males detained at the holding center was attending school. The official we interviewed told us 4 of the 10 youth (1 female and 3 males) were status offenders.

<sup>12</sup>The on-site instruction provided at the five shelters varied from 4 hours to 5 days per week. One of these five shelters hired a retired teacher to provide on-site instruction. Youth at the other four shelters were taught by licensed teachers.

<sup>13</sup>The alternative schools were for students who could not attend the local public schools because they needed treatment services and/or had exhibited delinquent behaviors.

<sup>14</sup>One of the three female-only group homes also had an on-site school staffed by a licensed teacher. The on-site school served females who had discipline problems, had dropped out of the local public schools, or were preparing to obtain a general equivalency diploma.

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## Medical Services

According to service providers at the 15 facilities we visited, females and males were receiving needed medical services, either provided through arrangements by parents or guardians or from local community health-care providers. For example, pregnant females admitted to some facilities received prenatal care. Facility staff at one shelter told us that a male had been referred to a local dermatologist for severe acne. In addition, staff at several facilities reported that many of the females and males had to be referred to community dentists because the youth had never received dental care before arriving at the facilities.

Also, females and males reportedly were given health screenings and/or physical examinations before or after admission. The health screenings included a list of questions to determine each youth's immediate health needs. The physical examinations typically involved a nurse' taking each youth's temperature and blood pressure and checking for any signs of physical distress.

All four of the secure detention facilities and one of the six shelters had on-site medical personnel. These personnel ranged from a nurse, who was available from 3 days to 7 days per week, to a doctor, who was available from 1 day to 5 days per week. Although these five facilities had on-site medical personnel to address minor medical problems or dispense prescription medication, some service providers at these facilities told us that their facilities were often overcrowded and needed additional medical staff. For example, at two secure detention facilities, the on-site nurse could not fully treat all of the youth on each day's sick list and, thus, had to select patients.

The remaining five shelters, four group homes, and the nonresidential facility did not have on-site medical services. Four of the 10 officials at these facilities told us that such resources were needed. For instance, one official explained that counselors were having to use their already limited counseling time to dispense medication and transport youth to doctors' offices.

**Appendix IV**  
**Overview of Services for Female and Male**  
**Status Offenders in Selected Facilities**

**Table IV.2: Summary Observations of Services for Female and Male Status Offenders at the 15 Facilities Visited**

Facility type	Name/Location	Gender served	Key services		
			Counseling	Educational	Medical
Secure detention	Regional Juvenile Detention Center, Duval County, FL	Female and male	Regular on-site individual and group counseling were not provided. Youth who displayed suicidal tendencies or requested counseling services were referred to community health-care providers.	Youth attended an on-site school, which had six classrooms and eight licensed teachers provided by the county. Daily co-educational classes followed a basic curriculum that included language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. The center also provided drug education and general equivalency diploma preparation.	On-site medical services included a nurse, available 5 days a week, and a doctor, available 2 days a week. Youth were given a physical within 3 days after admittance to the facility. The most common health problems were colds and sore throats.
Secure detention	Juvenile Detention Center, Fayette County, KY	Female and male	Regular on-site individual and group counseling were not provided. Youth who displayed suicidal tendencies or requested counseling services were referred to community health-care providers.	Youth attended the on-site school, which had one classroom and one licensed teacher provided by the county. Daily co-educational classes followed a basic curriculum. The center also provided remedial education. Classes could be canceled when the center was overcrowded.	On-site medical services included a nurse, available 5 days a week, and a doctor, available 5 days a week. Youth were given a physical within 3 days after admittance to the facility. The most common health problems were colds and sexually transmitted diseases.
Secure detention	Big Sandy Regional Detention Center, Johnson County, KY	Female and male	Regular on-site individual and group counseling were not provided. Youth who displayed suicidal tendencies or requested counseling services were referred to community health-care providers.	The center did not have a school. Some youth attended the local public school when the juvenile court judges ordered the schools to transport the youth to their classes.	On-site medical services included a nurse, available 5 days a week, and a doctor, available 1 day a week. Youth were given a physical 7 days after admittance to the facility. The most common health problems were headaches.

(continued)

**Appendix IV  
Overview of Services for Female and Male  
Status Offenders in Selected Facilities**

Facility type	Name/Location	Gender served	Key services		
			Counseling	Educational	Medical
Secure detention	Juvenile Detention Center, Bexar County, TX	Female and male	Individual and group counseling were not regularly provided unless the youth displayed suicidal tendencies or requested the services. The facility had one counselor on staff to meet these requests.	Youth attended the on-site school, which had six classrooms and six teachers provided by the county. Daily classes followed a basic curriculum. The center also provided independent-living skills instruction and remedial education. Classes could be canceled when the center was overcrowded.	On-site medical services included a nurse, available 7 days a week, and a doctor, available 3 days a week. Youth were given a physical 7 days after admittance to the facility. The most common health problems involved sexually transmitted diseases.
Shelter	Youth Crisis Center South, Duval County, FL	Female and male	Youth received approximately 3 hours of individual counseling and 4 hours to 5 hours of group counseling each week. Family counseling was provided on a voluntary basis. The counselor-to-resident ratio was 1 to 10.	The shelter did not have an on-site school. Youth attended the local public schools or an alternative school operated by the county. The shelter provided independent-living skills instruction and health education.	The shelter did not have on-site medical services. Parents or guardians were responsible for providing any needed medical services. The most common health problem was asthma.
Shelter	Interface Runaway Shelter, Alachua County, FL	Female and male	Youth received approximately 3 hours of individual counseling and 7 hours of group counseling each week. Family counseling was provided on a voluntary basis. The counselor-to-resident ratio was 1 to 8.	Youth enrolled in the local public schools continued to attend their regular classes. Youth who were not enrolled in the local schools attended an on-site life skills school that was taught by a retired teacher. The life skills school included remedial instruction, independent-living skills instruction, and health education.	The shelter did not have on-site medical services. Parents or guardians were responsible for providing any needed medical services. The most common health problems were colds, sinus infections, and lice.

(continued)

**Appendix IV  
Overview of Services for Female and Male  
Status Offenders in Selected Facilities**

Facility type	Name/Location	Gender served	Key services		
			Counseling	Educational	Medical
Shelter	Coleman House, Fayette County, KY	Female and male	Youth received approximately 2 hours of individual counseling a week. Group counseling was not provided. The counselor-to-resident ratio was 1 to 7.	Youth residing in the county attended local public schools. A teacher conducted on-site remedial instruction 4 hours a week for out-of-town youth or youth who had dropped out of school. The shelter also offered independent-living skills instruction and general equivalency diploma preparation.	On-site medical services included a nurse, available 3 days a week, and a doctor, available 1 day a week. Youth were given a physical within 3 days after admittance to the facility. The most common health problems were allergies and colds.
Shelter	Second Mile Runaway Home, Prince Georges County, MD	Female and male	Youth received approximately 4 hours of individual counseling and 4 hours of group counseling each week. The counselor-to-resident ratio was 1 to 2.	Youth either attended the local public schools or received tutoring at the facility. A licensed teacher provided instruction every-other-day to youth not attending the local public schools. Facility staff provided instruction on the days the tutor was not available. The shelter also provided independent-living skills instruction, health education, and parenting classes.	The shelter did not have on-site medical services. Parents or guardians were responsible for providing any needed medical care. The most common health problem for both females and males was hepatitis B. The females commonly needed prenatal care or treatment for sexually transmitted diseases. The males commonly needed treatment for colds or dental problems.

(continued)

**Appendix IV**  
**Overview of Services for Female and Male**  
**Status Offenders in Selected Facilities**

Facility type	Name/Location	Gender served	Key services		
			Counseling	Educational	Medical
Shelter	Walden Sierra, Inc., St. Mary's County, MD	Female and male	Youth received 6 hours of individual counseling and 4 hours of group counseling each week. The counselor-to-resident ratio was 1 to 2.	Youth who resided in the county attended the local public schools. A licensed teacher provided instruction 4 hours a day, 3 days a week to youth not enrolled in the local public schools. The shelter also provided independent-living skills instruction, health education, and parenting classes.	The shelter did not have on-site medical services. The residents' health-care needs were met by local health-care providers, including a hospital, women's clinic, and pharmacy. Females commonly requested gynecological services.
Shelter	Letot Center's Emergency Shelter, Dallas County, TX	Female and male	Youth received 6 hours of individual counseling and 14 hours of group counseling each week. The counselor-to-resident ratio was 1 to 8.	Youth attended the on-site school, which had two classrooms and two licensed teachers. Daily co-educational classes followed a basic curriculum. The shelter also provided independent-living skills instruction, drug and health education, and parenting classes.	The shelter did not have on-site medical services. Youth received a physical within 2 days after arriving at the county's juvenile detention center, which also provided any additional medical care. The most common health problems were asthma, lice, scabies, and sexually transmitted diseases.

(continued)

**Appendix IV  
Overview of Services for Female and Male  
Status Offenders in Selected Facilities**

Facility type	Name/Location	Gender served	Key services		
			Counseling	Educational	Medical
Group home	Bardstown Group Home for Boys, Jefferson County, KY	Male	Youth received 1 hour of individual counseling and 3 hours of group counseling each week. The counselor-to-resident ratio was 1 to 8.	The shelter did not have an on-site school. Youth attended an off-site alternative school operated by the state and the local public school district. Daily co-educational classes followed a basic curriculum, and most of the classes were remedial. The alternative school also provided counseling, health education, and recreational activities.	The home did not have on-site medical services. Youth received a physical from community health-care providers within 7 days after admittance to the facility. The most common health problems were severe acne and dental problems.
Group home	Project Respect Group Home for Girls, Fayette County, KY	Female	Youth received 4 hours of individual counseling and 3 hours to 5 hours of group counseling each week. The counselor-to-resident ratio was 1 to 4.	The group home did not have an on-site school. Youth attended an off-site alternative school operated by the state and local public school district. Daily classes followed a basic curriculum, and most of the classes were remedial. The alternative school also provided counseling, health education, and recreational activities.	The home did not have on-site medical services. Physical and general medical care were obtained from community health-care providers. The most common health problems were colds, dental problems, sexually transmitted diseases, and urinary tract infections.

(continued)

**Appendix IV  
Overview of Services for Female and Male  
Status Offenders in Selected Facilities**

Facility type	Name/Location	Gender served	Key services		
			Counseling	Educational	Medical
Group home	Salvation Army Adolescent Treatment Center, Bexar County, TX	Female	Youth received at least 1 hour of individual counseling and 3 hours of group counseling each week. The counselor-to-resident ratio was 1 to 5.	Youth attended the local public schools or an on-site alternative school. The alternative school, which followed a basic curriculum, had one licensed teacher provided by the local school district.	The home did not have on-site medical services. Physicals and general medical care were obtained from community health-care providers. The most commonly requested treatment needs were dental and gynecological services.
Group home	San Antonio Youth Residential for Females, Bexar County, TX	Female	Youth received 2 hours of individual counseling each week. No formal group counseling was provided. The counselor-to-resident ratio was 1 to 4.	The group home did not have an on-site school. Youth attended the local public schools 5 days a week.	The home did not have on-site medical services. Youth had to receive a physical prior to admission and general medical care from community health-care providers. The most common health problem was sprained ankles.

(continued)



**Appendix IV  
Overview of Services for Female and Male  
Status Offenders in Selected Facilities**

Facility type	Name/Location	Gender served	Key services		
			Counseling	Educational	Medical
Non-residential program	Practical and Cultural Education Center for Girls, Duval County, FL	Female	Each youth was assigned an adviser who spent approximately 5 hours a week discussing personal and academic issues and goals. The adviser-to-student ratio was 1 to 10. In addition, a therapist provided each girl with at least 1 hour of counseling (individual, group, or family) each week.	The Center is an alternative school that helps girls obtain high school credits or their general equivalency diplomas. The program had seven teachers and seven classrooms. The daily classes followed a basic curriculum, and some of the classes were remedial. The program also offered independent-living skills instruction, drug and health education, and parenting classes.	The home did not have on-site medical services. Parents, guardians, or the students themselves were responsible for obtaining any needed medical services. Prenatal care and gynecological services were obtained from community health-care providers with the permission of the parents or guardians. The most common health problem was asthma.

Source: Developed by GAO from information provided by facility officials.

# National Survey of County Juvenile Probation Department Officials



U.S. General Accounting Office

## Juvenile Justice System: Survey of Probation Officers

### INTRODUCTION

The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO), an agency of Congress, is required by statute (P.L. 102-586) to conduct a study on gender bias in the treatment of status offenders. This survey, which is being sent to a national sample of chief probation officers, is one of the approaches being used to gather information on these topics.

Most of the questions in this survey can be answered easily by checking boxes or filling in blanks. A few questions require short narrative answers. Additional comments may be written at the end of the questionnaire. If necessary, additional pages may be attached.

If someone else in your office is more directly involved with the issues addressed in this questionnaire, please pass it along to that individual.

We do not intend to identify individual jurisdictions in our report.

The questionnaire should take about 20 minutes to complete. If you have any questions you may call Ms. Barbara Stolz at (202) 512-8819.

Please return the completed questionnaire in the enclosed pre-addressed envelope within 10 days of receipt. In the event the envelope is misplaced, the return address is:

U.S. General Accounting Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Room 3660  
Washington, DC 20548

Attention: Barry Seltzer

Thank you for your assistance.

Please enter the name, position, and phone number of the person completing this questionnaire in case we need to clarify a response.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

### Please note:

For purposes of this survey, "juvenile" is defined as a person at or below the upper age of juvenile court jurisdiction in your state.

A "status offender" is defined according to the laws of your state.

A few questions contained in this questionnaire ask you to provide numbers and percents. Whenever possible we would appreciate that you enter the actual amount, however, if that is not possible, an estimate will suffice.

Please answer these questions based on your overall experience in your jurisdiction.

Appendix V  
National Survey of County Juvenile  
Probation Department Officials

I. BACKGROUND

All questions apply to status offenders.

1. Is your office involved with status offenders? (Check one.)

1. Yes --> Continue with question 2.

2. No ---> This completes your survey. If possible, can you refer us to the office in your jurisdiction that processes status offenders?

Name of probation officer: \_\_\_\_\_

Street address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return your questionnaire in the envelope provided.

2. In your jurisdiction, which branch of government provides juvenile probation services? (Check all that apply.)

N=349

- |                     |        |
|---------------------|--------|
| 1. Judicial Branch  | 80.8 % |
| 2. Executive Branch | 22.3 % |

3. Which of the following types of services are provided for status offenders by your probation office? (Check all that apply.)

N=349

(NOTE: Percentages total to more than 100% due to multiple responses.)

- |   |        |
|---|--------|
| 1. Intake screening (i.e., referring to case screening for legal sufficiency and/or needs, pre-sentence investigation, diversion, crisis intervention, detention screening, etc.) | 94.0 % |
| 2. Supervision or surveillance, post-adjudication   | 84.8 % |
| 3. Identification of services   | 81.7 % |
| 4. Direct provision of services   | 67.0 % |
| 5. Other - Please specify: _____  | 14.6 % |

## II. GENDER BIAS

The term "detained" refers to a youth being placed in a restrictive facility (i.e., one that limits mobility) during the time period between referral and case disposition (whether the disposition was formal or informal).

The term "confined" refers to a youth being placed in a restrictive facility after the judicial decision has been made -- post disposition.

- 4a. In total, approximately how many status offenders did your office handle in calendar year 1993?  
(Enter number.)

N = 338

Mean = 286.78

\_\_\_\_\_ Status offenders

- 4b. Of the status offenders that your office handled in calendar year 1993, approximately how many were petitioned (handled formally)? (Enter number.)

N = 334

Mean = 74.83

\_\_\_\_\_ Petitioned (handled formally) status offenders

Of these cases, how many were . . .

N = 297

detained for 24 hours or less . . . . . Mean = 10.48

N = 303

detained for more than 24 hours . . . . . Mean = 5.20

- 4c. Of the status offenders that your office handled in calendar year 1993, approximately how many were disposed of informally, that is, with no judicial hearing? (Enter number.)

N = 320

Mean = 205.42

\_\_\_\_\_ Status offenders disposed of informally

Of these cases, how many were . . .

N = 290

detained for 24 hours or less . . . . . Mean = 12.31

N = 275

detained for more than 24 hours . . . . . Mean = 3.21

Appendix V  
National Survey of County Juvenile  
Probation Department Officials

5. Based on your experience, consider the various groups or organizations such as law enforcement officials, school officials, social workers, and parents who may refer boys and girls for status offenses. (Check one for each.)

N = 349

a. In your jurisdiction do law enforcement officials . . .

1. refer boys more than girls?	42.4 %
2. refer boys and girls about equally?	38.4 %
3. refer girls more than boys?	16.3 %
No Response	2.9 %

b. In your jurisdiction do school officials . . .

1. refer boys more than girls?	38.1 %
2. refer boys and girls about equally?	51.3 %
3. refer girls more than boys?	6.6 %
No Response	4.0 %

c. In your jurisdiction do social workers . . .

1. refer boys more than girls?	17.8 %
2. refer boys and girls about equally?	55.0 %
3. refer girls more than boys?	12.9 %
No Response	14.4 %

d. In your jurisdiction do parents . . .

1. refer boys more than girls?	23.5 %
2. refer boys and girls about equally?	42.7 %
3. refer girls more than boys?	26.9 %
No Response	6.9 %

e. In your jurisdiction does (Specify) . . .

1. refer boys more than girls?	5.4 %
2. refer boys and girls about equally?	6.0 %
3. refer girls more than boys?	2.3 %
No Response	86.2 %

Appendix V  
National Survey of County Juvenile  
Probation Department Officials

6. Consider boys and girls who are referred for similar status offenses only. Do not consider boys or girls referred for any delinquent offenses.

a. In your jurisdiction, for these similar status offenses, are referred boys or referred girls more likely to be detained? (Check one.)

N = 349

- |  |        |
|--|--------|
| 1. Boys are much more likely to be detained than girls     | 9.2 %  |
| 2. Boys are somewhat more likely to be detained than girls | 11.5 % |
| 3. The detention rate for boys and girls is about equal    | 38.1 % |
| 4. Girls are somewhat more likely to be detained than boys | 8.6 %  |
| 5. Girls are much more likely to be detained than boys     | 0.9 %  |
| Other or No Response                                       | 31.8 % |

b. In your jurisdiction, for these similar status offenses, are referred boys or referred girls more likely to be adjudicated? (Check one.)

N = 349

- |   |        |
|---|--------|
| 1. Boys are much more likely to be adjudicated than girls     | 6.9 %  |
| 2. Boys are somewhat more likely to be adjudicated than girls | 9.7 %  |
| 3. The adjudication rate for boys and girls is about equal    | 61.6 % |
| 4. Girls are somewhat more likely to be adjudicated than boys | 10.6 % |
| 5. Girls are much more likely to be adjudicated than boys     | 2.3 %  |
| No Response   | 8.9 %  |

7. In your jurisdiction, when boys have committed a status offense, are they more likely or less likely than girls to have also committed a delinquency offense or is the rate about equal? (Check one.)

N = 349

- |  |        |
|--|--------|
| 1. Boys are much more likely than girls to have also committed a delinquency offense     | 43.3 % |
| 2. Boys are somewhat more likely than girls to have also committed a delinquency offense | 39.8 % |
| 3. The rate of delinquency offenses by boy and girl status offenders is about equal      | 12.6 % |
| 4. Girls are somewhat more likely than boys to have also committed a delinquency offense | 1.4 %  |
| 5. Girls are much more likely than boys to have also committed a delinquency offense     | --     |
| No Response  | 2.9 %  |

Appendix V  
National Survey of County Juvenile  
Probation Department Officials

The term "confined" refers to a youth being placed in a restrictive facility after the judicial decision has been made -- post disposition.

8. Consider boys and girls who are adjudicated for similar status offenses only. Do not consider boys or girls referred for any delinquent offenses.

For these similar status offenses, are adjudicated boys or adjudicated girls more likely to be confined? (Check one.)

N = 349

1. Boys are much more likely to be confined than girls	9.7 %
2. Boys are somewhat more likely to be confined than girls	12.0 %
3. The confinement rate for boys and girls is about equal	41.5 %
4. Girls are somewhat more likely to be confined than boys	6.9 %
5. Girls are much more likely to be confined than boys	2.0 %
No Response	27.7 %

9. Based on your experience, how would you describe the current availability of treatment options (facilities and services) for detained and confined boy and girl status offenders? (Check one for each.)

N = 349

a. For detained status offenders, treatment options are . . .

1. much more available for boys than girls	6.9 %
2. somewhat more available for boys than girls	8.9 %
3. about equally available	44.4 %
4. somewhat more available for girls than boys	1.4 %
5. much more available for girls than boys	0.6 %
6. No basis to judge	10.9 %
Other or No Response	26.9 %

b. For confined status offenders, treatment options are . . .

1. much more available for boys than girls	7.7 %
2. somewhat more available for boys than girls	10.3 %
3. about equally available	45.0 %
4. somewhat more available for girls than boys	1.7 %
5. much more available for girls than boys	0.9 %
6. No basis to judge	14.6 %
Other or No Response	19.8 %

Appendix V  
National Survey of County Juvenile  
Probation Department Officials

10. Think in general about the treatment options (facilities and services) that were available two years ago in your jurisdiction for boy and girl status offenders. How would you describe the availability of treatment options for boy and girl status offenders at that time ? (Check one.)

N = 349

Two years ago, the availability of treatment options was . . .

1. much more available for boys than for girls	7.7 %
2. somewhat more available for boys than for girls	16.9 %
3. about equally available for boys and girls	59.3 %
4. somewhat more available for girls than for boys	1.7 %
5. much more available for girls than for boys	0.9 %
6. No basis to judge	11.5 %
Other or No Response	2.0 %

11. Considering the relative needs (e.g., counselling and other services) of boy and girl status offenders, how would you describe the adequacy of the current funding available in your jurisdiction for boy and girl status offenders? (Check one.)

N = 349

Funding available to meet the needs of status offenders is . . .

1. much more adequate for boys than for girls	2.0 %
2. somewhat more adequate for boys than for girls	6.3 %
3. about equally adequate for boys and girls	69.9 %
4. somewhat more adequate for girls than for boys	1.7 %
5. much more adequate for girls than for boys	--
6. No basis to judge	10.0 %
Other or No Response	10.1 %



Appendix V  
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12. In your jurisdiction, what are the differences, if any, in the ways boys and girls with similar status offense histories are processed in the system for similar status offenses at any of the following stages?

N = 349

a. In the referral/arrest process -

No Differences	71.6 %
Some Differences	9.2 %
Other Responses/Not Applicable	5.5 %
No Response	13.8 %

b. In the detention process -

No Differences	50.1 %
Some Differences	8.0 %
Other Responses/Not Applicable	28.9 %
No Response	12.9 %

c. In the intake process -

No Differences	79.1 %
Some Differences	2.6 %
Other Responses/Not Applicable	3.8 %
No Response	14.6 %

d. In treatment by the court -

No Differences	70.5 %
Some Differences	9.2 %
Other Responses/Not Applicable	5.7 %
No Response	14.6 %

e. In the length and type of disposition -

No Differences	70.5 %
Some Differences	6.6 %
Other Responses/Not Applicable	6.9 %
No Response	16.0 %

---

**Appendix V**  
**National Survey of County Juvenile**  
**Probation Department Officials**

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**III. OVERVIEW**

13. If you have any other comments concerning the issues raised in this questionnaire, please use the space below. If necessary, you may add additional sheets.

**N = 349**

**COMMENTS** 39.3 %

**NO COMMENTS** 60.7 %

Thank you for your assistance.  
Please return your completed questionnaire in the envelope provided.

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